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ABSTRACT

Articles on the use of student journals in high school and college English-as-a-Second-Language instruction, specifically in the Japanese context, include: "Journal Writing and the Damaged Language Learner" (Alan J. McCormick); "Interested?" (Sven G. M. Puetter); "Tradition and the Student Journal" (George Deaux); "Reader-Response Journals" (Peter Silver); "Journal Writing as Communciation: Responding to the Rhythm and Bass" (J. David Simons); "The Role of Teacher Response in High School Journal Writing" (Mary R. Harrison); Journal Writing for Japanese Students: What Do They Write and What Do They Learn?" (Yoshiko Takahashi); "Journal Writing: A Teacher's Reflections" (Rebecca A. Pickett); and "Student Voices: The Insiders Speak Out on Journal Writing" (Christine Pearson Casanave). (Individual papers contain references.) (MSE)

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JOURNAL WRITING: PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Keio University, SFC (Shonan Fujisawa Campus)

Institute of Languages and Communication

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Introduction

In this monograph, a group of English teachers express their views on the activity of journal writing in their classes at the new Shonan Fujisawa campuses of Keio University and Keio High School. The views are diverse, and reflect different backgrounds (literature, applied linguistics, education) different pedagogical philosophies, and different perspectives.

Nevertheless, the papers share a hopeful attitude about the potential of English education in Japan. They speak of creativity, communication, liberation from constraints, freedom to learn and to feel, confidence to express oneself, engagement and involvement, the reawakening of interest, personal and intellectual growth, and the repair of long-term intellectual damage. They document a kind of awakening of spirit, through which students who are not sure what their spirits are or where they should direct them discover that a foreign language is helping them make these discoveries. They document the astonishment that many students feel on discovering they have a voice and that their voices—the voice of a single individual—is being heard, not once a semester, but every week. And they also provide countless examples of the prolific communicative outpouring of a foreign language—English—on the part of the students, many of whom had never communicated at length in English before. At the heart of all of this excitement is journal writing.

What Do We Mean by “Journal Writing?”

While the specifics of our conceptualizations of journal writing may differ, in general we refer to an activity in which students write freely and from the heart (i.e., without the linguistic or rhetorical constraints typical of regular academic writing) to a teacher who will respond as a real reader rather than just as an evaluator. The focus of this writing is on content and personal involvement, not on grammar and correctness. Journal writing is thus seen as a communication device that gives everyone in a class the chance to “talk” and receive feedback from a teacher. It also gives the teacher a chance to talk to students individually, and to receive feedback from them.

Journal Writing in the Japanese Context

In spite of all of the favorable evaluations of journal writing from work done in the U.S., it is not clear to what extent it is used or useful in Japanese university or high school classes of English as a foreign language. The normal circumstances of English language instruction in Japanese high schools and universities militate against this labor-intensive teaching device: large classes of forty or more students, little actual contact time in class, the tendency of high

school English classes to focus only on entrance exam English, the tendency of university students to deemphasize classwork in favor of social activities and part-time jobs, and the heavy work load of many teachers. At the writing of this monograph, it is not known to what extent journal writing is used in English classes in Japan.

Journal Writing in Keio SFC English Classes

At Keio SFC, an ethos is developing among some students and professors throughout the university and in the new high school as well about the importance of studying. Language classes in the university are "small" (30-35), contact time for freshman and sophomore language students is 6-8 hours a week, and full-time language teachers are given a manageable work load. A number of teachers, therefore, have asked students write journals once a week or once every two weeks as part of their homework, and have managed to respond regularly, even if briefly, to 60-100 of these. Anecdotal evidence, as well as more systematic investigation (see Casanave, 1992), suggests there are overall positive effects on English language development and on thinking. Harrison (this volume) has tried journal writing in her Keio SFC high school classes as well, where the number of students is nearly double.

At the university, during most semesters eight to ten English teachers at Keio SFC, including some native speakers of Japanese, ask their students to write journals as part of their regular work in the English class. There is no standardized format, technique, or set of guidelines. Rather, each teacher sets up his or her own criteria with each new class of students. Nevertheless, certain tendencies can be highlighted that give the activity of journal writing at SFC, and in Harrison's high school classes as well, a sense of cohesiveness and shared purpose. First, all teachers require that students turn in journals on a regular basis. This is usually once a week or once every two weeks. Topics may be left completely to students's choice, guided in a general way by issues brought up in class readings and activities, or occasionally guided in more specific ways by sets of questions from readings or class discussions for students to consider. (Teachers generally feel that too much guidance results in what Peyton [1992] has described as "school-like essays.") Teachers often ask students to write a minimum number of words or pages but generally do not grade individual journals other than to record that they were turned in and meet length requirements. A grade may be added later at the end of the semester.

Most teachers read and comment on each journal, even if briefly. They usually restrict their responses to substantive comments on students' ideas. Some teachers make occasional small corrections of grammar and vocabulary; others make no corrections. A few of the teachers ask students to share journals with each other, through e-mail, through public display or reading, or in small group discussion sessions in class. A number of teachers ask students to compile all the

journals written in a semester into a notebook, which serves as an impressive tribute to students's work and progress throughout a term.

Most teachers believe that regular journal writing will provide the normally quiet Japanese students with the kind of sustained and unfettered language practice that will lead to improvement in English (writing, grammar, vocabulary, fluency), that it will help them engage with issues that are important to them and to class activities and thus contribute to learning, and that it will encourage them to express individual opinions to a responsive reader without fear of making mistakes or of censure from peers. Journals, they believe, give all students a voice, as well as sustained language practice.

The Contents of This Monograph

In the first paper of the monograph, McCornick frames the journal writing activity in the larger contexts of education in Japan and of English education in the Japanese high school and university. Finding the typical Japanese learner "damaged" in some senses, he argues persuasively for the healing and liberating effects of the journal writing activity in the English language class. Puetter's paper then discusses journal writing from the teachers's perspective, focusing on the issue of interest. Arguing that—regardless of what they may say—teachers respond most favorably and most fully to journals they find interesting, thus providing students with richer and more motivating feedback, he identifies through interviews with teachers what makes journals interesting for them to read. Deaux's paper also deals with interest, but from a very different perspective. He claims that students need models from which to write their own journals, particularly at the beginning of a course, in order to locate themselves within a tradition and to understand the kinds of personal and specific details that make a journal interesting. Using models from Japanese literature, he demonstrates how students who read from within their own literary traditions can produce personal and memorable images that are inspired by these traditions. Silver's paper also concerns reading, but less from a literary stance than from a cognitive and interactive one. Writing on reader response journals, he attempts to identify how readers make meaning from printed texts and how journal writing can foster the engagement with texts that is needed if students are to create anything meaningful from the reading they do.

Two papers deal with the communicative aspects of journal writing. Using an analogy of learning to play the piano, Simons focuses on the liberating effect of uncorrected journal writing on the communication process and on the role of responsive and genuine teacher feedback in this communicative activity. Harrison writes from the perspective of a high school teacher. She examines her own feedback to her 165 teenagers who wrote journals once a week and discusses several categories of feedback that serve different purposes in the journal writing process. Takahashi is the only author to examine the topics that her students

wrote about in weekly journals. She groups the topics in rhetorical categories and discusses the patterns she found over time. Pickett writes her own journal on journal writing, from the teacher's perspective. In her "journal," she touches on many of the issues in a reflective way that have been explored by the other authors. Finally, Casanave's paper presents the students' views of the journal writing process. Using written and oral data in both English and Japanese, she documents a generally positive response from students. They believe that their English language and writing abilities improved, that they became more fluent writers (and in some cases, speakers), and that they developed personally and intellectually through the journal writing process.

Taken as a whole, the papers in this monograph represent an exciting potential of individualized instruction within teaching conditions that normally preclude individualization. While all authors will no doubt attest to the labor-intensive nature of responding to our students' journal writing, all have regarded it as perhaps the most valuable English language activity that they do. In the Japan context, at least, journal writing may constitute the single most beneficial activity for the development of students' confidence and communicative ability in English.

Journal Writing and Writing about Journal Writing: The Exploration of Self

Journal writing, as a number of the papers in this monograph suggest, allows student writers to learn something about themselves through the process of writing and of receiving focused feedback on their ideas. This learning is always private, and can never be documented first hand no matter how articulate a student may be. We trust it is happening because, for the most part, we believe the words they write about what has happened to them, we see the interest on their faces when we return their journals with our comments, and listen to their discussions when they sit with their peers and share them with each other. Something is happening, not with all students, to be sure, but with most.

But it is not students that I wish to discuss in concluding this introduction to our monograph. It is ourselves. For the authors of the papers in this monograph, the experience of writing about journal writing has helped us explore ourselves as well. We have spent many hours alone, wrestling with our ideas, struggling to express deeply felt sentiments, realizing for the umpteenth time in our lives that writing in any language is difficult and that good writing—writing that expresses what we want to say in ways that are accessible to readers—comes easily to none. It always seems so easy at the beginning—the ideas, the passions, the messages are felt so viscerally that it feels as though the words will spill out in a coherent outpouring of beautiful prose. But then something happens. One of us discovers her ideas are not linearly conceived; the process of making

them linear is pure torture. Another finds that the ideas flowed into prose like melted butter into a biscuit. But then another of the contributors got hold of the draft and trashed it—back to square one. It turns out it's not back to square one, of course, because draft two (three, four, ...) could not have been done without previous drafts. Others discover what many writers discover—that putting down thoughts in writing exposes gaps, dysfluencies, errors, and confusions in our thinking. Drafts two, three, and four require rethinking, not just polishing.

And finally, most of us, by writing about journal writing, have been forced to come face to face with our educational philosophies. We have been forced to explain in some detail to each other in peer-reading sessions and to readers why we do the things we do in our classes. In the process of wrestling with these issues in the context of writing this monograph, we have been challenged by others in the group as well as by ourselves. Perhaps we would not have undertaken this philosophical self-reflection had it not been for these challenges posed by the individual writing task and by the group interaction that occurred once drafts were being shared. In a sense, then, these papers constitute our “journals” about journal writing. We have used them to learn more about our students, to be sure, but in the process have also learned more about ourselves, about each other, and about our beliefs in the potential benefits of journal writing in English education in Japan.

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Journal Writing and the Damaged Language Learner

Alan J. McCornick

The aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education.

John Dewey

Introduction

Over the course of three years since the opening of the Shonan Fujisawa Campus of Keio University (SFC), journal writing has emerged as a major teaching device in the English section of the foreign language department. A majority of instructors now use journal writing to supplement their courses and the rationale that has been developed to explain its popularity is currently helping to define the emerging guidelines for the English language curriculum. This paper attempts to clarify a major portion of that rationale by setting out the context in which the teaching and learning of English at SFC takes place. I will attempt to explain the larger context, on both the national and the local levels, and set out the guidelines for a journal writing class in that context.

The National Context

At center focus in any discussion of higher education in Japan, of curriculum, of university goals or the ranking of schools, or the social significance or impact on the individual, is the phenomenon of the entrance examination. The structure of the educational system is centered on it, the lives of teenagers and their parents are determined by it, and the quality of education is defined by it. In the lives of many young people, it is the coming-of-age experience. Along with marriage and entering the right company, it is a major crossroads. For the determiners of Japan's future, it is an experience to haunt their days and nights. Many will tell you, in fact, that it even overrides marriage and the choice of work in that it helps to determine whom one will marry and where one will work. There is even a universally acknowledged term for the phenomenon: the examination hell.

No discussion of teaching and learning in the university can avoid looking at the effect of the entrance examination system on Japanese university students' attitude toward their education, toward learning, knowledge, and the purposes of a university class. Discussion of the examination process goes on at all levels and complaints about the competitive nature of the system abound—how parents feel obliged to register children in the “right” kindergarten, so they will have a head start on the right elementary school, which leads to the right high

school. How the multi-billion yen juku and the yobiko industry came into being to compensate for the inability of high schools to cram enough "information" into little heads to guarantee success in the exam. How Japan's unparalleled world success in promoting and achieving universal literacy in the early years is then sabotaged as the goal of inclusion is turned one hundred eighty degrees to exclusion.

My purpose here is not to take issue with Japan's need to limit access to higher education, nor even to take on the means for doing so. One way to train an elite class is to seek out "well-rounded personalities." Another is to limit spaces on the basis of geographic, racial, or other quotas. A third way is to give the spaces to the wealthy and well-connected. All systems have their limitations. The Japanese have chosen a kind of lottery system where students are forced to cram countless thousands of pieces of information into their heads and are then tested on an arbitrarily selected portion of that information. If this isn't fair to all, administrators and others can at least console themselves with the fact that it is equally unfair to all.

The Effects of an Exam-oriented Approach to Education

I am not concerned here, at least not directly, with the wisdom or folly of testing. My purpose here is to take a closer look at some of the effects on learning of that choice and ask what these effects mean for university teaching pedagogy. In asking what this entrance-exam approach to learning does to the learner, I am seeking to identify where the learner stands when he or she enters the university and how an educator can most effectively reach out to help.

The most profound effect the spectre of the entrance examination has on schooling in Japan is in the way it sets up a testing consciousness. Education becomes all about testing. Anyone who has ever participated in a university entrance exam is struck by the intense discipline of the setting. Students know what to expect. They know all about identification cards, seating arrangements and other attendance procedures; they have extra pencils ready and sharpened, their "turf" is a model workspace. They are obviously well-trained in the entire experience. Nothing has been left to chance. This experience is a culmination of years of preparation. Test-taking is in their blood.

What does this mean, this test-taking approach to schooling? It means a number of things, not all of which may be called educational. A test-taking mentality is first of all competitive. Learners are being tested against their peers, their classmates and friends. It is a game of winners and losers and they know most will be losers. Some enjoy the game and talk later of the discipline it provided them. Many learn the strategy of resignation. Most find it hell and remember the experience as one of the most destructively stressful of their lives.

Is it any wonder these people arrive at the university with something other than a love for learning!

Secondly, it creates a conception of knowledge as information which is a) something which comes in pieces; b) something which can be encapsulated and handed down and received, as from an expert to a novice, from a "knower" to a disciple; c) something which is received only with discipline and hard work; d) something external to the self; e) something which is to be taken in and held, to be possessed until the time comes when one is called upon to demonstrate that it is in one's possession. Love of learning? How does one learn to "love" learning in these circumstances?

The Place of the English Language in the Entrance Exam System

The study of English is especially hard hit by the testing approach to education. English, together with mathematics, is the heart the testing process. So intense is the focus on testable facts about the language, in fact, that schools have had to admit they have had to cast aside any hope of teaching the language as a living means of communication. Since English continues to be used as Japan's language of wider communication, this is more than a little ironic. Not only must the real work of training for the exam be done by supplementary juku and yobiko; the real work of teaching Japanese to communicate must then be done by another kind of supplementary school—the commercial eikaiwa (English Conversation) institutes. Tens of thousands drop hundreds of thousands into the economy via this route to language as communication.

What is learned in the public schools is a great deal of information about the English language—the kinds of facts which lend themselves to outside evaluation by somebody who can declare the fact "correct" or "incorrect". The testing orientation leads directly to the perception of language as a never-ending flow of right and wrong answers. Each word out of the mouth, each word off the tip of a pen is a test. Is it right? Is it pronounced, spelled correctly? Is it used correctly? Am I doing it right? Or am I making myself look foolish?

What is not learned in school, not generally, is that English is a means of communication used by arguably a greater variety of people across cultures than any other. That millions communicate in it as a first, second, third language, tell the time of day in it, cry "Help!" in it, say "I love you" in it and feel in their bones what all these real-life messages mean. To these millions, it is not a game to play, not a data base for demonstrating knowledge in an examination, but a way to handle thoughts, ideas, emotions, a way to lie or tell the truth, persuade, negotiate, argue and entertain.

The native speaker knows what language does. His or her own language, that is. One raised in a multi-lingual environment knows that all languages

do the same. Most Japanese students, given the new circumstances of greater exposure than ever before to the world outside, would know it too, were it not for the entrance examination. Left to their own devices, many would find their way naturally to a communicative approach to language learning; it is, after all, the way most people outside of school learn languages (and most people still learn a second language outside of school). But the luxury of learning a language this way is not given to them. They have to surrender this attitude, and do it quickly, if they are to succeed in the entrance exam process, a fact many returnees have attested to.

Turning the Ship Around

What does all this mean for the university English-teaching context? It means that a large number of students have learned to hate the very thought of the English language. English is intimately associated with the examination hell, with stress and sleepless nights, with demonstrations of inadequacy. Even those who have not learned to hate it, who perhaps because of friends, or travel, or love of rock music, or for some other reason, have kept an interest in learning English despite the drudgery of having to cram for the exam, even those young people approach it with some fear. It means, too, that they are totally unprepared for the sudden switch in approach to language. Suddenly, in front of the classroom is a teacher who is not governed by the entrance examination mentality. Virtually all of their teachers with professional training take the approach that language must be taught as communication, and since the profession of ESL/EFL is now widely recognized in Japan, this means an ever-increasing number of teachers in the system. These teachers cannot but approach the teaching of language in Japan as a conflict of learning strategies. Something has to give.

What often gives, unfortunately, is the teacher. Overwhelmed by the enormity of turning this super tanker of an approach to language around in the water in the limited time available to language classes, many teachers give up. "I feel I have to meet their expectations, if I am to reach them at all. If that means being an authoritarian figure who makes them practice, so be it." "I try to spot the four or five in my classes with a strong desire to learn, and I sort of forget about the rest."

Fortunately, others, as this volume on journal writing demonstrates, don't give up so easily. When faced with administrations whose approach to learning can be summed up by the directive to "go into that room and come out when you have learned your lesson...", they maintain the view of language teaching, as they do of all learning, as an exercise in exploration and discovery. When faced with a learner blocked by fear and other negative emotions, they seek solutions not in greater linguistic knowledge (which at some level always remains a goal to be sought after, but which was the problem in the first place) but in strategies which will lead directly to the reform of language attitudes.

Journal Writing

Journal writing is arguably the best single way to accomplish the change. It is, first of all, creative writing. Not writing to display knowledge, but writing to discover knowledge. Students learn by doing, not by performing what they have learned elsewhere. They learn by writing that language in general and writing in particular are more than the give-and-take of information exchange. As E. M. Forster once put it, "I write in order to discover what I really think." It is something intensely personal, something they can do at their own pace, in their own style, for their own purposes. It is something which eventually demonstrates to them (if they stick with it) that they have a body of ideas which amounts to something, which is unique and able to be expressed. It is strange and new, at first, but increasingly familiar with time. It becomes a source of identity and, in time, a source of self-understanding.

Time is the crucial condition. Such transformation does not happen quickly or easily. In the short run, the external discipline provided by a teacher, can be taken as more of the same, more authority-figure insistence on work, on production and display of knowledge. One must stick with it long enough for there to be a breakthrough. Some students can do this in a single semester. In my experience, most students take longer. As Casanave, Simons (this volume), and others have demonstrated, it does work. At SFC, the common experience for those required to maintain a journal for three semesters is a flood of testimony about its positive effect on the writer, this anecdotal evidence being the impetus for the Casanave study.

The Local Context: Teaching English at SFC

I have been attempting to set the teaching device of journal writing in the larger Japanese educational context, but I think it is also important to set it in the local (SFC) context. The particular orientation of the SFC campus distinguishes its approach to English from that in most Japanese universities in at least three fundamental ways. Let me take these up as three perspectives: the approach taken by the university, the student approach, and the approach of the teachers of English.

From the perspective of the administration, the study of a foreign language is subject required for all freshman and sophomores. There is a push for students to study a language other than English. "Good" students, especially, are encouraged to "take the opportunity to become familiar with a second foreign language and its cultures," with special emphasis placed on Asian languages. There is official administrative support, in other words, for good language learners to try their hand at a language other than English. This encouragement does not work entirely; the practical value of English, the advantage of a "head start", and the familiarity with English-speaking cultures is still a strong draw. Also,

while a number of high school English burnouts may opt out of English, hoping they will have better luck with another language, there remain a significant number of students who have translated the burnout in English to a burnout in language study more generally, and decide they would rather wrestle the bear they know than risk a Godzilla they have yet to meet.

From the perspective of students that do "stay" with English—even those with little motivation, there is a great hope that something will happen this time around. There are more class hours, more foreign teachers (the student perspective, remember), and lots of hype about how this campus is different from (read: better than) all others. The expectations are high and disillusionment is always just around the corner.

Not without cause. There is promise of—some have actually used the phrase—a revolutionary change. Classes are "small" (30-35), students have more contact hours (up to six a week), and there is the energy that comes with newness. It is difficult to argue in this environment that while a class of 30 maybe a small class relative to the national norm, one needs to question the assumption that the decrease from 50 or more students to 30 (however radical this is in bureaucratic terms) changes classroom dynamics sufficiently to cause any sort of revolution. It is difficult to argue that five hours a week must be set against a course load of eight or ten courses and, for many, a two-hour commute from Tokyo. One wants terribly much not to be a naysayer in this environment. But there is cause for disillusionment. The old hand in administration and teaching may sincerely believe he is seeing revolutionary change, but the realistic student sees more similarities to other language classrooms than differences.

From the perspective of teachers with a desire to teach language as communication, there is a set of hurdles. There are the struggles familiar to any university. "My course is as important as your course and maybe just a tad more important." There is the outsider view that language education is training, and not education. "Take 'em in a room and use your expertise to train 'em in 'language skills' and when their TOEFL score is high enough, I'll be their professor and teach them." There is the conflict between what students want and what the general faculty want of the English program. Students want practical experience in the spoken language; faculty want students to be able to read academic articles in English. There is the familiar conflict between research and teaching. "Do the best you can, but don't let it interfere with your real work." There is the cynicism of colleagues. "What can you do? They don't want to learn; they want to play." It is a daunting task.

But while these problems seem insurmountable in the aggregate, they don't look so bad taken one at a time. There is administration support for courses to be taken seriously. Attendance requirements are enforced, and failures are noted on student transcripts. One does not have to fight administrative apathy in this regard. While some may feel language classes are all about training, language teachers have the same access to students, the same chances to discuss

their goals and aspirations and strategies for achieving them, as any others. Language teachers have no actual impediment to involving themselves fully in the course of their students' education, and being part of it. Part of a language department's task is to inform those in other departments about what, in fact, can be done in and around the language classroom. They need to work to convince non-language faculty (and not all need convincing—many are out ahead) for example, that education hung up on testing cannot get to the hearts and minds of the learner, and that language proficiency, too, cannot be reduced to a TOEFL score. The scholar-not-teacher is a hard nut to crack, but while they do little to further the educational agenda, they seldom stand in the way of its progress, either. And the proponent of the view: "They don't want to learn; they just want to play" can be shown to be wrong.

It is this last "problem" that is the most serious. Highly motivated learners learn in the most adverse of conditions—one need only to look at language classrooms in Uganda or Vietnam for evidence of that. But where did this myth come from, that students simply want to "play." Part of it, obviously, is the moratorium phenomenon—the lockstep condition that doesn't permit the Japanese to rest except during four years at university.¹ And the very important knowledge that many companies choose students on the basis of their social skills, not their academic skills. But anyone who knows what students are up to knows that for many of them much of what looks like "play" is serious business.

Informal surveys taken with classes, and with advisory groups, shows students place "making friends" among their highest priorities. Many will also articulate some goal which clearly evidences their quest for a personal identity. The intensity of the years of cramming for the exam did more than teach them facts about English, math and history; it made them hungry for time they could call their own. This can be confused with "play", but that would only mask its import. Teachers know that when students' eyes glaze over with discussions of ecology, trade friction, the PKO and foreign worker issues, they can be brought back when the topic switches to ways in which their lives are personally affected. It is not that they are not motivated to understand crucial technical and social issues; it is that they are struggling with their priority not to lose themselves in the process.

This is not a new issue. Whether personal relevance should take precedence over expert notions of objectivity has been debated for generations now, and there is no consensus. And cutting through the discussion is the great pedagogical issue of motivation. To those who will treat subject matter as Holy Writ, the relevance question seems like an argument for the dropping of standards.

¹I am aware that I am taking the *sarariiman* for the whole, that women are subject to different forces from men, that not all high school students go to university, that not all university students feel pressured to climb. The *sarariiman* class, as Japan's "referent class", nonetheless sets the tone for the nation, and for the pace and rhythm of the university in particular.

But those interested in reaching out not to the few but to the many cannot help but seek the continually changing means to do so.

A Dialogue on Journal Writing

And this brings me finally to the use of journal writing in the language classroom. I would like to introduce the journal assignment here as it is introduced to my students. Because of space constraints, I have set up the introduction as a dialogue between me and a fictional journal writer. In fact, the writer is not fictional, but a composite of student writers over the past twenty years or more. The questions have not changed in that time. The “dialogue” evolves over the first couple of weeks into the assignment.

JW: Sensei, what do I write about?

AM: Anything. Whatever you find interesting. But write about your ideas and opinions. Descriptions of things will rarely be interesting; your feelings about things will almost always be.

JW: But I don't have anything to say!

AM: Write about whatever you find yourself thinking about—work, problems, sports, vacation, home and family, anything.

JW: But some of the things I think about are very personal.

AM: Write about anything that you care about. Don't be afraid of what is appropriate and what is not. You can say anything. At the same time, I'm not asking you to share secrets you are not comfortable sharing. You can find ways to write about personal things that don't make you more vulnerable than you want to be.

JW: But what happens when I've said all that?

AM: More will come. As long as you think, you will have something to write about.

JW: But I don't know how to begin! I can't write a sentence without making mistakes!

AM: Don't worry about the mistakes. We're not going to pay much attention to the mistakes.

JW: Will you correct my mistakes?

AM: No.

JW: Why not?

AM: In the first place, I don't have time. Not if I want to read all my students' journals every week. And I do. I want to reach each journal as soon as possible after it is written. In the second place, I don't want you to go on thinking language learning is all about making mistakes! It is about expressing your ideas, not about making mistakes.

JW: Will you read my journals every week?

AM: Yes. And whenever I can, I will write something back to you.

JW: Will you show them to other people?

AM: Yes, unless to tell me not to. I learn a lot from student journals. I learn how you are thinking, what you are interested in, how things are going on campus and in your lives generally. I think that information is of interest to your other teachers, so I often show it to them. If you want something kept secret, indicate that, and I will always respect your wishes.

JW: What do other people write about?

AM: The broadest range of topics imaginable! People write about their friends, about their university courses, their circles (club activities), things happening in the news, letters from home, travel, food, politics, sports—anything that interests them, anything they talk about over coffee or beer with their friends, anything they find themselves thinking about in the bathtub.

JW: Why do you set a page limit?

AM: Because I think you need a little push from outside. Quantity matters. In the long run, it is only after you have written a certain number of pages over a certain number of weeks and months, that it will become obvious to you how this journal works to teach you English.

JW: If I get very busy, can I write several journals at once?

AM: No. Part of the process is discipline. You need to manage your time so that you do a regular amount at regular intervals. If you do a whole bunch at once, you are doing it to please me, or to “satisfy the requirement,” not to express yourself. I don’t want that.

JW: How will I learn correct English if you never correct my English?

AM: I do “correct” things now and then. When I can show you a better way to say what you have said, I do that. But it’s not “correct English” that we want here. It’s ideas. It doesn’t matter that they are awkwardly expressed from the native speaker’s point of view. What matters is that you are demonstrating to yourself that you can think, that you can express what you think, and that you can use English to do this in. Besides, your language will improve as you use it. Without corrections from teachers.

JW: But how am I learning English this way?

AM: You will be surprised. Vocabulary and grammar from the things you read and the things we talk about in class will start finding their way into your journals. But more importantly, when you stop “performing”—showing off how many words you can translate, how many structures you can build accurately—and start “communicating”, things will happen to your attitude toward learning.

JW: What’s wrong with my attitude now?

AM: Maybe nothing. But most students in Japan have learned English as an “outsider’s” language. Things “mean” something only when said in Japanese. Many feel that English is all right for foreign people, but not for them. They need to become convinced that they can use English just as they use Japanese—to think in, to communicate in, to “be” in. In time, as the number of journal pages builds up, it gradually sinks in that this is true.

JW: When will this happen to me?

AM: I can't be sure. Just develop the habit of writing, and I promise you it will come eventually.

JW: How do you know this works?

AM: Students tell me it does all the time! Students say things like, "I never knew I could write. Now I keep a journal in Japanese!" and "Some things I had been confused about for a long time are becoming clear now that I put them down on paper and look at them. It's like I can have a dialogue with myself about these things when I can see them written out as if somebody else were saying them." Things like that.

JW: I can't imagine that will happen to me.

AM: Just make sure you stick to things that matter. If you write about things just to satisfy the assignment, this will not work.

JW: But what if I write about things that are not interesting to you!

AM: If you are sincerely interested in the things you are saying, I assure you I will find them interesting too. Everybody enjoys reading things written with enthusiasm and sincerity, no matter what it is. There is one other thing I ask of you, however. If you sense my comments lack enthusiasm, and that I really am not interested, ask me why. I'm sure there is no shortage of areas where our interests meet. It's the responsibility of both of us to look for those areas to come together on. Don't worry too much about this. I will be following what you write about and will write you, too. Carrying on a conversation that is interesting to both of us is the responsibility of both of us.

JW: I am worried about this. I am afraid the other students are more interesting. Some of them have lived outside Japan, so they know much more to write about.

AM: All I can say is, begin. Start writing. We are going to share journals from time to time, so you will hear what people are writing about. But I don't want you to compare yourself with them. This is not a competition. Your journals will be unique. Only you can write the things you put into them. They are your thoughts, your ideas.

JW: I still don't understand how this is going to "teach" me English!

AM: You'll have to do it and see. As long as you follow the guidelines to write the minimum amount and to write things that you are interested in, it will work. You will find yourself wanting to know how to say something, and when you get the answer, you will remember it better than if it was just a list of vocabulary words in a textbook. Give it a try.

JW: Will you give me a grade on the journals?

AM: No. Absolutely not. How could I? These are your ideas! Not something you are doing for me, but something you are doing together with me! If you fall below the required limit (ten entries in fifteen weeks) it will affect your course grade. But only the quantity, never the content of what you say.

A Variety of Approaches to Journal Writing

The issues taken up in this composite of student questions about the assignment cover some of my notions of what goes on and why in the writing of journals. Other contributions to this volume will make clear that others have a different set of priorities and concerns. Deaux, for example, is convinced students need not to be set adrift in the process and that models from literature impose a sense of direction and value (I might say “dignity”) to the activity. I have argued that the use of models only furthers the fear that education is a hard uphill climb and that they may not be up to the task. I believe setting students adrift leads to discovery learning, provided it is done in a conspicuously caring environment. I would reject the comfort of those models for that reason. Deaux and I appear to be reaching for different segments of the student population. We are certainly both responding to classroom challenges with strategies that have worked well in our own classrooms. How much form to impose and how much stress to create is every individual teacher’s judgment call.

Commonly, journal writing teachers suggest students use journals to respond to classroom activities. That provides valuable feedback, especially in an environment in which students are reticent to express criticism of a teacher. The caveat stands. As long as students can be made to feel there is no right answer in their responses, this guidance may be useful. If there is any suggestion of teacher evaluation in the process, however indirect, I would argue against it.

Puetter has taken up the very important issue of interest. Clearly, the focus on being interesting can backfire. Students do worry about whether they are being interesting, and it is very easy for a teacher indirectly to convey disapproval through silence, often unwittingly. Such a response can destroy weeks of a building up of confidence. The only solution is responsible oversight that no student is being ignored.

In Conclusion

I am aware that my use of the term, the “damaged language learner” sounds extreme. Most students are not damaged people. They are helped through the stresses of the educational system by caring families and friends and most survive egos intact. The question, though, is how well they survive as learners. What is their approach to learning after this entrance examination hell? Can they find the academic environment as exciting as they once did as children? Before they came to think of it as a place of drudgery and obligation. Can they ever find it as valuable as they do the world outside the classroom?

And can they learn that language is communication? That a foreign language is not permanently foreign? And that language use is not “performance”, not display of knowledge, but interaction. Can they learn that it is personally relevant, that it is more than a “window on the world”, that it is a means of

going out into the world and being of the world.

As a teaching device, journal writing has two major limitations: it is not spoken language (which students consistently declare they want to spend most of their time on in a language course) and it is time-consuming. To the former criticism, the answer is that it is not a substitute for face-to-face communication, and that both expressive modes of interaction, speaking and writing, are necessary for learning.²

For the teacher, who ultimately decides what goes on in the classroom, the time factor is a more serious consideration. Currently, at SFC, journal writing has been used as a supplementary exercise, not as the main activity in any language course. Possibly, in the future, a course can consist entirely of written correspondence, although teachers usually feel students benefit from some sort of communal identity which can only come from a classroom. In the meantime, as a supplementary exercise, it does in fact take up more teacher time and student time both than preparation for other classroom activities, when done adequately.

The answer to this is in its effectiveness. It works where other activities fail in bringing students back to the classroom, in making them responsible for their own learning, and in removing the fear and drudgery of foreign language study. Because so many teachers find this to be true, they find themselves doing it for the inherent teaching rewards. Two hours spent reading and responding to journals feels like less time than two hours correcting tests. One is as energized as a teacher by the former as one is enervated by the latter. Surely the quality of the experience has to be calculated on a par with time. The quality of the teaching and learning experience comes not from knowing that a body of material is being covered on schedule, that students can parrot your words and adopt your ideas, or that proficiency scores are rising. The quality of the experience comes from success in changing the classroom from a sea of masks into a gathering of individual faces. From letting go of students, knowing you have enabled them to continue on their own without you. And from knowing you have brought them back and made them want to learn again.

²See Casanave, this volume, for student comment on how journal writing contributed to the speaking skills: setting a conversational tone, increasing familiarity of topic, exploring points of view, and general language use.

Interested?

Sven G. M. Puetter

Introduction

Some written passages stay with us while others just fade away. A motivated writer will create a piece that captures the imagination, a passage that ignites and rivets our interest. This is the basis of a good piece of writing and it is passages such as these that are often found in the journals produced by our students.

Journal writing (for a definition, see the introduction to this volume) is an approach to the instruction of writing based on the communication of ideas. Students learn to perceive their journals as pieces of communication (see Simons this volume) directed at a real audience. The audience (in this case, the teachers who assign journals at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus) often comments on the message contained in each individual journal. This can be a frustrating endeavor when journals are either superficial descriptions of yesterday's weather, or a collection of vaguely coherent facts. However, upon creating and submitting an engaging journal, a student elicits extra, more engaging, feedback from their professor and it is this exchange of ideas that contributes to the student's language acquisition process.

The comments contained in this article, from a number of teachers at SFC, provide evidence that the implicit fostering of reader interest helps students develop journal writing skills. We have inadvertently established a new criterion, and seem to judge journals according to how interesting they are for us. As instructors we have taken on the responsibility to judge and encourage what is interesting and to discourage that which is not. Moreover we put ourselves in a position to facilitate and achieve this objective. If we do respond more fully to papers that we find interesting, it would be instructive to ascertain exactly how we as teachers establish what is interesting and what is not, as well as look at some of the teaching approaches employed to aid the production of interesting journals by our students. In this paper I will argue therefore, that one of the notions implied in the assignment of journals and in the communicative feedback that we give is that students should make them readable, interesting pieces of communication.

In light of the above, I will look at three basic questions:

1. How do we as instructors establish what is interesting in journals and what is not?
2. What in general, are the implicit factors that characterize interesting journals?

3. What are some of the teaching approaches used by teachers to lead students to write increasingly engaging prose?

Teacher Interest

We enjoy reading a journal that is well written. Many of our students in the intensive English program at SFC are capable of submitting pieces of writing that are perfect in form, but it is the ones (or in some cases parts of those) that interest us that we are more likely to respond to with supportive comments. If we view journals as pieces of communication, the ease with which we respond to journals depends on the extent to which they elicit our interest. The following remarks by some of the teachers that I interviewed reflect their attitudes towards interesting journals. They referred to them as “a teacher’s dream come true” and “a breath of fresh air.” Of journal submissions that teachers found uninteresting they frankly stated: “Sometimes I really need to search for something to comment upon,” and: “It’s a kind of torture,” and even: “I don’t comment on those (journals) that I find boring.”

Clearly we don’t find all journals that we receive interesting, and only enjoy commenting on those journals that are. It is a revealing exercise to determine exactly what it is that excites teachers when reading journals. Interviews with fellow staff members showed they became engaged when journals:

- have content I am interested in
- are teaching me about something I am interested in.
- contain things that are interesting to (the student)
- share ideas with me
- describe the topic in a different way
- (have) little surprises and foreshadow events
- contain imaginative use of language
- include something from the heart
- are used to express emotional ideas....., and disclose things I can respond to
- (describe) a topic that is personal to me (or is) about me or my class
- are a response to something (I) have seen or read
- (show) a student’s mind, attitude or knowledge shift and grow.

- include some experience in their lives of something, of the outside, and their opinion.
- contain imagination and creativity
- (are not) superficial journals, (which) are boring

Individually, we are aware of what is interesting to us in our students' journals. Not one of the teachers interviewed said that they enjoyed all of the journals they received, and in fact some used harsh words when describing their attempt to devise comments for journals that did not pique their interest. Instructor interest therefore seems to have definable limits, and it is these limits which determine the type and quality of teacher response.

Factors Leading to Journal Interest

How topics and issues are handled by students in their journal writing is an issue that concerns many teachers. There are many levels that students can choose from when elucidating on a particular subject. These range from the superficial treatment of a topic, the "Yesterday it was sunny and we went to the zoo" type, to a more thoughtful piece of writing, such as the following:

I went to Italy last summer. There houses and buildings on streets made by stones, stone-paved roads and other things are just what they were....But what is more, they were built considering lands or climates of Italy and actually they fit to Italy's land or climates, so the people who live in there seem to be able to live happily and comfortably. NO (26/6/92)

This journal passage taken from an entry by one of my students stood out as a thoughtful treatment of her topic. I, as well as other teachers, then, do seem to have well formed opinions on what makes a journal stimulating. These opinions can be reconceptualized as a set of implicit interest parameters. From the list of teachers comments above it appears that teacher interest in student journals is governed by some or all of the following six parameters:

- content
- common ground
- writer self interest
- creative language use
- affective content
- intellectual effort

I will discuss each of these in turn.

Content and Common Ground

Some instructors strive to establish areas of common interest between themselves and their students over the course of the term. These may or may not be of special significance to either the learner or the instructor, but they do serve as a conduit of communication between reader and writer. As one teacher noted: "I will respond to anything that is interesting and over time a common area of interest will be discovered."

When a journal is concerned with content that is of special relevance to the instructor it will be of interest to her. It does not so much take the point of view of the reader as recounts content areas that the reader is interested in. A teacher who uses journals in her classes had this to say: "Purely the content and not the writing style (makes journals interesting)." In the same interview a comment on content by another colleague was: "Journals are interesting because they are interesting to me." Yet another colleague had this to say: "I have trouble being interested in cars and baseball, but there are other things that are interesting and these are the interesting things to read." Students who present factual information to their teachers can produce what are considered to be engaging journals, but one of the keys to creating such a journal seems to be for the teacher and student to have shared interests.

A slight variation on the theme of content relates to the area of the teacher as learner. We know that our students have knowledge and expertise in a broad variety of fields. When a student brings to her journal content that is new and appealing, we sit up and take notice. The instructor becomes the learner, as a teacher noted, "when the students are teaching something to the teacher." It is important to note that the teachers interviewed did not suggest that being given new information on a topic constituted instruction on the part of the student. On the contrary, only if the information was relevant to their needs or gave them new insights into their own personal reality did teachers find a journal interesting. Consider the following example that one teacher found interesting from one of his students:

Where are there only girls? I will say a girl's school, a nurse station and Takarazuka. Takarazuka is the name of a city in Japan. That is in west Japan. Takarazuka-kage kidan was born in Takarazuka. Kagekidan means a group of people who dance, sing and perform. Takarazuka-kagekidan consists of only girls who don't get married. MM (22/6/92).

While this journal used the literary device of beginning with a question to create initial interest, the teacher pronounced its content to be its most engaging quality: "It provided information about a society of people who chose celibacy as a way of life, and gave lessons in both character building and an alternative lifestyle."

In short, it is the substance of the journals, whether built up through ne-

gotiation between teacher and student over time or arrived at by chance, that can provide a connection between writer and reader. On one level, the teachers enjoyed reading about things that interested them; content which appealed to them in terms of common interest produced engaging results. On another level, teachers were active learners, and students were able to provide insight and information not usually found in day to day teacher/student interaction. By exchanging ideas based on content and common ground, a student can establish a channel of communication with her instructor based on an interest parameter.

Writer Self-Interest

While the choice of some journal topics may on the surface appear to be dull, a writer who has a clear, intrinsic enthusiasm for a topic has the potential to bring that topic to life. Through self-interest the author may be more easily able to transmit her convictions and ideas to the instructor-reader. One of the teachers had this to say:

If you (the student) write about things that are interesting to you, they will be interesting to me. If they are uninteresting to you, they will be uninteresting for the teacher, even if the teacher is interested in the topic.

Given that teachers are a potentially interested audience looking for animated, thought-provoking responses from their students, one of the factors that will help create a captivating journal is writer self-interest. Teachers look for student engagement with their own ideas, something beyond the superficial. If the student is interested in the discussion, the writer's self is involved and this can lead to teacher interest. In a final journal at the end of a semester, I asked students from several classes to comment on this issue and almost all of the students agreed with the following comment by one of them:

I would like to think about a topic which I chose by myself more deeply.....In the case of free topic, we can think about things in which we are interested in and which are important to us. OT (28/1/92).

Topics that students are interested in cover a wide spectrum, including emotional and social issues, hobbies and general interests. A passionate interest in a topic is more likely to lead to the creation of a situation where students are willing to invest effort, thereby creating an engaging journal. The existence of this particular interest parameter in a student journal results in a teacher being more easily able to respond to the journal with an enthusiastic comment.

Creative Language

It is often said that there is nothing that has not been said before. People are often reinventing the wheel. And so it is with students and journal writing.

Situations exist in a journal writing exercise that lead to a flood of journals that are of note only for their banal similarity. Teachers find themselves reading the same reports of the long commute to college or the Sunday trip to the museum. After flicking through fifteen nearly identical journals, one catches the eye. Why? Chances are that the writer treats the topic using creative literary devices that startle the imagination. As one teacher was moved to note:

A student picks a word from the dictionary, a word that has the right denotative meaning but the wrong connotative meaning. Suddenly you have a sentence that no native speaker writes unless they were a genius.

Interest is aroused when topics are discussed using attractive sentence styles, unusual choices of vocabulary or other literary devices. Several instructors noted the importance of style in creating an interesting journal. Elements included good, poetic uses of metaphor and/or vivid description. Again the same teacher's comment:

Style can make a journal interesting, (it) gives form to the content. Language that is good, poetic, (or) uses a metaphor, or describes it (the topic) in a different way, leads to interest.

One journal received by an instructor covered the topic of flatulence. The teacher, while initially surprised at the choice of topic, went on to note that his student, through the use of metaphor and analogy, developed an unusual treatment of flatulence into an engaging piece of journal writing. As he put it, "I received a journal on flatulence and commented to the student, 'that's interesting.'"

Other features considered to make journals appealing included specificity, irony and suspense. In terms of specificity, a teacher noted that the more detail that is included, the more interesting the journal becomes. This is in contrast with the factual approach noted above, and is more in terms of critical thinking about a particular issue as opposed to a broad, superficial "many-fact" approach. Irony and suspense create an atmosphere of anticipation and this can also lead to interest. In the passage quoted above by MM on Takarazuka-kagekidan, the first sentence lent the opening remarks, and hence the passage, a certain amount of intrigue.

The topics chosen by the students may be well worn themes, but through originality in the use of language, an ordinary topic can be transformed into one that demands attention.

Affective Content

Teachers invariably look for evidence of personal investment in a topic and/or the inclusion of some experience relevant to the student's life. According to

the teachers that I interviewed, even in the case of a poorly written journal, if the content included some experience of the individual student's life, either in the form of a personal opinion or "something from the heart," the journal was considered interesting. It should be noted that the topic covered did not necessarily need to be of direct personal interest to the teacher. Rather, the criterion was that of affective investment by students in their choice of journal topic. An example from one of my students provides a clear demonstration of how affective content can help make a journal interesting:

The people who take trains are salaried workers, students, school teachers, and so on. Mainly, salaried workers take trains. All of them go to their companies and go home at almost same time every day. Although I am a Japanese, I sometimes feel a little afraid that in trains there are so many salaried workers who wear similar business suits and have similar tired faces. But, among them, there is my father. My father is special to me, but to others in trains, he is one of those business men. Perhaps, many people who are special to somebody gather in trains. It's natural, but trains they seem to have no individuality. NO (12/5/92).

Interest is sparked in other words when journals are received that touch the emotional or the personal. One teacher commented that "in writing they (students) can express their emotional things better, and when they do disclose these things, I can respond." Another said that he responded to "specific references to ones class or to the class taught by someone else. Or anything personal."

Instructors on the whole will maintain that they strive to be objective, dispassionate observers of their students work. However, journals can, over time, become much more than a simple writing task and develop into a forum for personal and emotional appeals. It should be of no surprise that teachers are drawn to journals containing elements of human emotion.

Intellectual Development

At the university level, we are often taught to rely on facts in the form of substantiated evidence, proven research or well documented ideas. However, the kind of academic, as well as less academic writing that just lists unintegrated facts, clearly does not, in the minds of the teachers I interviewed, make for an interesting journal. Journals of this kind have been characterized as having no intellectual depth. A typical example would be:

This '91-'92 season had started with lack of some all stars who injured in last playoff games. Isia Thomas (PISTONS), who injured in 1990 and couldn't attend to last play-off, splendidly came back this season. On the other hand, Larry Bird (CELTICS) was some games off and was not good condition in this season for his injured back.

Chris Mullin (WARRIORS), he is also all-star forward, was not good either for his broken knee. David Robinson (SPURS) twisted his left thumb in March and SPURS must fight in first round of play-off without him. And last lacking important player is "Majic" Johnston (LAKERS) couldn't attend only one game for his cold at first. MO (4/92)

Barring an overriding interest by the teacher in the actual topic, a student who concentrates on a collection of simplistic factual information like this will, in general, produce an uninteresting piece of journal writing. Teachers look for intellectual involvement and growth. A student who has thought about a topic lends depth to her journal by including personal observations, changes in attitude, and restructured views and opinions. These remarks from two instructors typify the ideas of those interviewed: "(It is) really interesting what people think, how their minds work," and "You've taught the student that the learning experience is an exciting experience."

We generally perceive our role as educators as either the building of information systems or the development of thinking skills. As instructors, therefore, we are always satisfied to see evidence of either intellectual effort or knowledge development on the part of our students.

Pedagogic Considerations

I have suggested that teachers have a variety of implicit criteria which they use to assess whether journals are interesting. How are these encouraged and what are the reward systems that teachers employ to elicit "interesting" journals from their students? I will suggest five approaches.

A Humanistic Approach

Journal writing in the context of interest can be characterized as being based on humanistic principles. A humanistic instructional program described by Valett (1974) begins with human needs. In journal writing, the students need to communicate with and engage the mind of the teacher-reader. After writing, when students receive comments on their journals from their teachers, they are having their thoughts and ideas validated. As journal remarks are based on content and style that teachers find interesting, the evaluations and comments students receive accentuate the positive aspects of a student's intellectual and emotional growth. According to Valett, these aspects include the promotion of creative expression, the pleasure of expressing oneself creatively, the acceptance of one's peers and the development of self worth, and love, through encouragement, praise, and support. By promoting communication bounded by interest we are creating an avenue for such self development.

Teacher Comment

It would seem to be intuitively obvious that the more feedback a student gets from her teacher the greater the potential for intellectual and linguistic development. But in the case of journals, a teacher's comment on any one journal will vary in length. During the interviews I learned that instructors typically spent more time commenting on student journals that they found interesting than those that were not. Consider the following remarks made by teachers: "I read out those that are (interesting) in class," and "I wrote back with a seventeen page reply," or simply "I don't comment if they are not."

The effect this has on students can only be guessed at, but consider these two representative responses from students in my classes: "I look forward to what you tell me" and: "Why didn't you write anything?" Through their feedback, teachers lead students to guess where and if their teacher thinks there may be a problem in the messages expressed in the journal. Comments either on a supportive level, through intellectual curiosity, or in praise of creativity, may instill in students the drive to improve their journals in line with one or more of the six interest parameters that I believe teachers use to determine what makes journals interesting.

Models

Teachers may use models to elicit from students an interesting journal. I found two types during the course of the interviews I held with the SFC teachers. The first used literature models from the student's L1, Japanese. Works such as those used by Deaux (see Deaux, this volume) have inspired writers and their readers in the past. They are not the grammar-based models that we usually see in a student text, but 'real language'. Teachers use such a model as an example for the student to follow, and their students produce journals that engage the instructor-reader on the level of creative language and content.

The second example is that described by Harrison (this volume), who openly labels journals as "good" in her classes, according to some of the criteria that she and other teachers used to describe interesting journals. These "good journals" provide models for her students to follow, an example if you like, for the student to live up to. The use of models in these two cases should not be confused with the mechanical models of the past but should be conceived of as practical and authentic ideas that students can apply to their own writing to promote an interest response on the part of the teacher-reader. They do not restrict a student's potential to choose her language in the expression of her thoughts, ideas and responses. Far from it. They provide the student with some of the basic ideas that can be employed to produce engaging journals.

Topic

Teachers, in their bid to elicit engaging journals from their students, have three approaches from which to choose: the set topic; the negotiated topic; and the 'free' topic. Setting the topic obliges the student to submit a journal about a specific idea. Teachers set a topic for several reasons. They believe a) it is interesting for the student; b) it is interesting for the teacher; c) it has the potential to elicit an interesting response; d) it is easy to write about. Students can compose appealing journals under these circumstances, although it is not the norm as some teachers that I spoke to pointed out. They noted that journal on assigned topics "have no depth" or are "likely to be exploited in terms of a factual response (and) tend to elicit a low level of interest." Teachers noted further that those student journals that do manage to spark their interest reveal "interesting language use" or "an unusual treatment of the topic."

The second, the negotiated topic, is arrived at either by class discussion or discussion between the teacher and the individual student. Two teachers described how negotiation can proceed. One said:

If I am not interested in the topic I will do several things to make it interesting: ask the student specific questions about the things that I want to know about ...(or) respond with a statement of empathy.

Another said:

I will respond to anything that is interesting, and over time a common area of interest will be discovered.

The third approach is free-topic choice, in which teachers give students unrestricted choice in what they want to write about. However, in the course of the semester students will react to the use of implicit cues given by the teachers in feedback so that even the so called 'free-topic' becomes negotiated.

The issue of topic assignment clearly has an impact on whether or not interesting journals are produced. Some SFC teachers said they assign topics at the beginning of term because they believe a topic will be easy for students to write about ("I gave my students the topic 'SFC' ") or because they think it will both spark students' interest and interest themselves as readers. However, the results often prove disappointing. Over the course of the semester, teachers will attempt to move the students towards producing journals which more closely resemble those that they have found interesting in one or more of the ways they mentioned in their interviews with me. The issue of how topics are assigned by teachers does seem related to students' production of interesting, engaging journals.

Grammar

The act of journal writing is unlike any other in the language teaching profession. Teachers are interested in meaning, in what their students have to say, in a

forum where teacher and student exchange ideas that stimulate and appeal. Teachers that I interviewed openly stated that they were not overly concerned with form or grammar. As one teacher said, "I've seen some terribly written journals that were interesting." This is a clear move away from the approach which treats language as a fixed body of knowledge. Another teacher noted: "I only comment on the content (and) never correct the grammar." Journals, in other words, do not focus on the nuts and bolts of a language. They are used to provide our students with the opportunity for using language. Writing journals is an act of communication, an exchange of ideas that facilitates development intellectually as well as personally.

In sum, one of the goals of journal writing is communication between teacher and student. I have suggested that teachers find only some journals interesting and not others. By setting implicit criteria, teachers elicit particular responses from their students in subsequent journals. In the course of a semester, these criteria manifest themselves in a number of teaching approaches that result in the inductive instruction of how to make journals interesting.

Discussion

In Casanave (this volume) there is evidence that points to the strong influence that journal writing has on the learning experience. Within this experience are two positions. On the one hand, bounded by the interest parameters outlined above, teachers look for and encourage appealing journals. On the other, students perceive journal writing as an experience that favors the free expression of ideas to an audience that appears relatively uncritical. This suggests that in order to foster an exchange of ideas with the teacher, a journal needs to pique interest. Further, for journals that do not, instructors will respond in such a manner that discourages students from continuing to write uninteresting journals as teachers tend to provide little (and in some cases no) feedback on such journals. On the other hand, feedback on journals that do pique teacher interest encourages more of the same. Consider the seventeen page reply mentioned above, or the techniques outlined by Harrison (see this volume) of publically displaying selected parts of her best journals.

What are the implications of all this? Do teachers teach students how to make their journals interesting? I would suggest they do, implicitly. Teachers do not nail down the individual factors outlined above and say write your journals in this way. That which commands attention is both hard to define and to some extent quite personal. Moreover, teachers find themselves in a situation unlike any other when assigning and evaluating journals. They are in an academic setting where evaluation is the norm and say to themselves: "I will not assign a grade, only comment on the content of this journal." However, the teacher/student relationship, especially in Japan, implicitly precludes impartial, value-free responses. Teachers appear to be unaware of student reaction fostered

by the existing, explicit journal reward structures: the substantive comments, the public displays in the classroom, or the privilege of communicating with a respected professor.

Journal writing is all about communicating ideas and many students probably feel a sense of accomplishment that they never felt before when they lurched from one structure-building drill to the next. By receiving teacher responses, they are writing for a reason. As a student from one of my classes wrote: "I really look forward (to) your comments about my journal." Journal writing with an implicit focus on interest enables students to perceive writing as the interchange of ideas between writers and their audience. Any approach designed to foster this basic idea in communication is one that has some inherent value.

By using journals as a teaching tool to encourage students to write interesting journals, we seem to be developing several skill areas. First, we are encouraging students to be interesting in order to provoke an audience response. Writers often do not have a specific audience, but in this case our student authors do, giving rise to immediate and, I would suggest, constructive feedback. Secondly, we are making students think for themselves, getting them to express their own ideas and attitudes in a format that provides a relatively open forum for expression. Finally, by moving students away from the strictures of mechanical skill development, our students are using language to translate their ideas into written form in ways that can be considered truly communicative.

Conclusion

With the journal writing assignment, teachers work under a set of stated assumptions. These are that we do not usually grade our students' work, and that we do not correct structural errors. However, based on the discussions with teachers and the conclusions reached by this paper, the truth is of a different hue. It seems that we do in fact evaluate our student's work, and use criteria that are subjective. While these criteria usually lead to positive results, it is somewhat disturbing that the criteria are largely unidentified both to ourselves and to the students we teach. We need to be aware that this process is occurring and take steps to ameliorate any negative effects that may arise as a result of an evaluation policy that has, up until now, remained largely hidden.

To be actively responded to by the teacher a journal needs to elicit engagement. I have argued that journals are evaluated using interest as a criterion and that one or more of the interest parameters described in this paper are implicitly imparted in the course of the journal writing exercise over the semester. By creating an interesting journal, students find that their teachers respond with comments that contain a broad range of language input, from semantically rich messages based on content, to syntactically correct language, to intellectually challenging material. Upon intellectually stimulating their professors, students find that they are on the receiving end of language input that cannot help but

facilitate language acquisition.

So what can we conclude? I would suggest that we have a situation where students are not being taught the language in the usual sense of building a system which they can, at some later date, use. They are instead put in a situation where they are using their language to express their ideas and develop as thinking individuals bound by an implicit criterion: interest. Students generally operate under the assumption that they are being evaluated by their teachers using known, explicit criteria. However in the case of the journal writing exercise, we are setting implicit criteria for journal evaluation and these can affect our students' subsequent journal entries. While these criteria may in fact work to facilitate language acquisition and produce learners who are motivated to continue their language studies, it behooves us to become aware of these implicit criteria and how they effect individual learners.

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Tradition and the Student Journal

George Deaux

Most of us who use journals in our language and writing classes make a distinction between writing for communication and writing for discovery. If we are college teachers we are often obliged to prepare our students to write clear and well-organized academic papers: writing to transmit ideas and information in an unambiguous way. To do so, we present models of academic writing and help students discover appropriate rhetorical structures to deal with particular topics. We help the students to understand that they must be clear in defining both their purposes and their intended audience. We insist that the writing be accurate and conform to the conventions of standard edited English.

At the same time, we realize that writing is not only a way of transmitting information but that it can also be a road to fluency and self-discovery. Students who do not have the habit of writing at all cannot really be expected to write accurately. Journals serve as a means of helping students learn to develop fluency by giving them freedom to write about whatever interests them without fear of being reprimanded for errors of grammar and mechanics. Whereas academic writing is characterized by accuracy and exhibits a clear thesis and controlled organization, journals are characterized by the free flow of ideas and images, associative organization and minimal concern for grammar, spelling and punctuation. The process of preparing an academic paper includes systematic pre-writing and careful revision. The process of writing a journal requires no revision and minimal pre-writing: in fact, the journal is pre-writing. Although the two types of writing are notably different, they converge at two crucial points: specificity and individual voice. The most interesting journals and the most interesting academic papers share these qualities. They are filled with specific details and observations, and they speak with the authentic, individual voice of the writer. Thus journal exercises which encourage specificity and the development of an individual style are useful even in classes where the primary goal is to teach academic writing.

In language classes where the goal is to help students develop the full range of skills—not only writing—journals can also serve a role by encouraging students to find that individual voice in English. In the process we can hope that they will become genuinely interested in what they are writing and, not incidentally, begin to write prose that we can be genuinely interested in reading and responding to. To that end, the qualities that I admire and encourage are specificity, honesty, and clarity.

Having decided to assign a journal project, and hoping to hear the authentic individual voice of the student, the instructor is faced with the question of

how, exactly, to introduce that project. Because writing journals is supposed to be an activity free from anxiety and open to the expression of individuality and spontaneity, many of us may be reluctant to impose restrictions, or even to propose models to be followed. Whereas we would never imagine asking beginning writers to undertake an academic writing assignment (such as defining an abstract concept, outlining the cause and effect chain of a complex event, comparing and contrasting any but the simplest phenomena, or attempting an essay of persuasion) without first giving them models and instruction, we nevertheless may be tempted to give our journal writers a completely open assignment. We may have an idea of "free writing" which supposes that writing which appears to be spontaneous is, in fact, a simple transcription of the thought process.

We can disabuse ourselves of such notions by looking at examples of "spontaneous" writing as they occur in literature. The interior monologues or "stream of consciousness" writing of James Joyce, William Faulkner, Nathaniel West, or Celine turn out to be the result of laborious revision. The "automatic writing" of the Surrealists and some of the Beat writers turns out to be the result of complex and sophisticated exercises in psychic distortion often involving drugs, sleep deprivation or meditative exercises. The search for the appearance of spontaneity lead William Burroughs and Brion Gison into very esoteric areas of mental distortion and aleatoric experimentation. Even if it is possible to find a case where the appearance of spontaneity has resulted from an actual automatic writing experience, I will argue that that experience has occurred to a writer—like Henry Miller—who has trained himself for years to be receptive to the flow of ideas and to be able to transcribe them in a personal style. In any case, it is not a type of writing which we can expect the beginning writer, much less a second-language learner, to be able to do effortlessly or without guidance.

If it is true that achieving the appearance of individuality and spontaneity requires a conscious and disciplined approach to writing at least as strenuous as that required to give the appearance of clarity and logical organization, then we may be doing our students—and ourselves—a disservice when we ask them to prepare spontaneous journal entries with neither prior instruction nor models of such writing.

This paper will argue: 1) that it is unrealistic to expect students to perform spontaneous writing exercises in the absence of instruction and models, 2) that students given a free writing assignment without such models or instruction will, in fact, find models for their writing, 3) that writing instructors will be able to read and respond to their students' journals more effectively if they recognize the models upon which they have been based, and, finally, 4) that if students are provided with proper models, their journal entries have a better chance of giving the appearance of spontaneity and being interesting both to write and to read. I will also attempt to make a few practical suggestions about the sort of models that may be appropriate for Japanese college students who have reached the advanced level in their studies of English and to give examples of student

journals which have followed, or appear to have followed, formal literary models.

The journals quoted here were written by advanced level students at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus in the spring term, 1992. These students had good vocabularies and a solid grounding in grammar. They could produce acceptable short academic papers if given enough time and the chance to rewrite, but their formal writing was generally dull and predictable. My goal was to elicit an individual voice and to encourage specificity and precise observation. Whereas with lower level students, the goal of journal writing might well be to help students expand their sentences, I was more interested in eliciting sharp, clear images. Thus I was more pleased with an original observation communicated in a fragment, than a commonplace written in an expanded, balanced sentence.

The Free Assignment

The most difficult assignment beginning writers can receive—and the one they are most likely to get at the start of a journal project—is “You may write about anything you want. Anything at all that interests you will be OK.”

The instructor may give a free assignment out of good will and hope: a desire not to impose stifling restrictions upon the writer's spontaneity and in expectation of releasing the creative spirit necessary to produce a journal entry which will be interesting both to write and to read. How better to create the atmosphere for discovery than by providing freedom of expression? If we set requirements, or even offer guidance with regard to form and, especially, content, are we not stifling the individual talent? Doesn't the free assignment present the writer with the maximum opportunity to be spontaneous and original and, therefore, interesting?

Student writers, receiving an open assignment, recognize and usually appreciate the instructor's good will and kind intention. They understand that they are being given an opportunity to be spontaneous and original. But, in fact, there is nothing at all that they really want to write about. There is no interest in their lives so compelling that it demands to be expressed in writing, at least not in written English. If there were, they would already have written it. The sources of good writing are in human feelings and emotions of which we all have our share, but the processes of turning emotion into prose and poetry are in no way natural or spontaneous. They must be learned. In the clutches of sorrow we weep and wail quite naturally, but we must be taught to write a eulogy. In love, we pursue the loved one—or gnaw our fingernails in lonely frustration—but we must learn, laboriously, to compose a sonnet. Turning feelings and emotions into writing is highly unnatural, an artificial process which even the most talented writers have to learn over long years. Musical prodigies are commonplace; there are absolutely no literary prodigies. Even if the beginning writer is bursting with ideas and emotions, he will need help learning how to turn them

into English prose.

So the students sit in solitary frustration and growing despair, staring at the blank page of the report pad, reproaching themselves for being so dull that they cannot find anything to write about when given such a friendly assignment by such a kind instructor.

The assignment which appears to offer unlimited choice really offers almost no choice at all. The students do not know where to begin, what voice to assume, what purpose to attempt to achieve, even what audience to address. Having probably been assured that their journals will not be formally graded or even corrected, they nevertheless know that they must sign their entries and turn them in to the instructor. What sort of personal information dare they hand in to this new and unpredictable *sensei*? Can they write about what is really on their minds: the problem of an alcoholic father or that troublesome unwanted hair on the upper arms? How should they address their teacher? What is the English equivalent of *keigo* in such situations? Finally as the hours count down and despair turns to self-loathing, the brave journalists crank out thoroughly predictable essays about their hobbies, last summer's vacation, the clubs or circles they belong to.

Meanwhile, the instructor, eagerly anticipating reading the fresh and spontaneous thoughts of her students, collects the journals only to find neither spontaneity, originality, nor even individuality. Rather she discovers safe and predictable freshman essays about hobbies and leisure time activities with a few "Dear Diary" entries interspersed. Firm in her resolve to be supportive and non-judgmental in this project, she responds with enthusiastic messages of encouragement, all the while sinking into boredom as she plods through one after another of these largely indistinguishable entries.

Reading the instructor's comments, the students breathe a sigh of relief. Their safe little essays were satisfactory. *Sensei* even praised them. They are now back in safe calm waters. Everything is as it always has been. They will continue to write about their hobbies, their vacation plans, their club and circle activities, with an occasional "Dear Diary" entry thrown in when they run out of other bland topics. No need to expose themselves. No need to talk about how Dad came home drunk again last night, got off on the wrong floor of the mansion and tried to break into the Nakamura's apartment, thinking he'd been locked out, and then Mrs. Nakamura started yelling and Old Lady Tanaka called the police and it was all Mom could do to keep them from taking Dad off to the *koban* and this morning at breakfast he was all hungover and irritable and said something really dumb about the unwanted hair on my upper arms and I started to cry and then he started laughing and, oh what the hell!, I think I'll just drink a bottle of tile cleaner and end it all, cruel world!

Why a Free Assignment Often Fails to Produce Interesting Journals and What to Do About It

Every artist—and while they are composing their journals, the student writers are artists—must work out of a tradition. Even the most startlingly original work is recognizably original only in comparison with the tradition from which it arises. A new work that is utterly outside the framework of the tradition would be unrecognizable as a work of art at all. In fact, such a work is inconceivable since its creator would have to be a creature remote and isolated to the extent of being unaware of the very idea of art and consequently of the concept of the artist. A nightingale in song might be such an artist. A sunset might be such a work of art.

In giving student writers a free assignment within the context of a journal project, we may actually be asking them to create an individual work independent of a tradition, at least of a tradition which they understand and can manipulate. We may be asking them to turn themselves into nightingales or to create sunsets. In the face of such difficulties, the student writers are likely to turn to the nearest tradition they can find. This is the case not only with our students but with most artists. They turn to the most accessible tradition and copy it, turning out an endless stream of predictable stories, poems and plays derivative of last year's successes. Our students will turn to the traditions most familiar to them: the standard English class essay and the "Dear Diary" entry.

Expanding our students' understanding of the tradition in which we are asking them to work may help them to find original topics. At the very least it will give them the outlines of the genre and answer some of the questions every writer must answer before setting to work: What is the purpose of writing this? Who am I addressing? What is the appropriate level of formality? What topics have been covered in this genre before? What do I have to do to go beyond the conventional, to express my individual talent?

An understanding of tradition is necessary not only for the creation of the individual work but also for its appreciation and evaluation. Sakaguchi Ango writes that "even in arts that place a premium on originality, imitation has frequently led to discovery. Inspiration often begins in the spirit of imitation and ends with discovery" (Keene, 1984, p. 1072). And T.S. Eliot reminds us in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (Eliot, 1921). Art being paradoxical, out of just such morbidity comes lively creation and cogent criticism. The artist immerses himself in tradition not to repeat it slavishly but to move beyond it to originality. Readers inform themselves of the tradition in order to be able to appreciate the originality of the individual work.

We as teachers may be able to help our students achieve individuality and

originality in their journals by informing them of the tradition in which they are being asked to work. At the same time, by informing ourselves of that tradition, we may be better able to understand and appreciate our students' work and be better able to guide them in future assignments.

Making Use of the Tradition

Japanese literary tradition provides excellent models for journal writing. Although they will probably have studied them as monuments to be admired and memorized rather than models to be adapted to their own purposes, Japanese students will be familiar with these models from their high school literature courses:

Nikki and *kiko*: diaries and travel literature. Some of the very earliest writings in Japanese are diaries, often describing travels. The earliest example is *Tosa Nikki*, written in 935. Students will also know the four major Heian court diaries: *Kagero Nikki*, *Murasaki Shikibu Nikki*, *Izumi Shikibu Nikki*, and *Sarashina Nikki*. They will certainly know Basho's *Oku no Hosomichi*.

Zuihitsu: literally, "following the writing brush", thus observations, feelings, and reflections set down in a casual, or apparently casual, way. The most famous examples, and three of the best known works of Japanese literature, are Sei Shonagon's *Makura no Soshi*, Kamo no Chomei's *Hojoki* and Kenko's *Tsurezuregusa*. The brief essays that constitute these works are probably the best models for student journal entries.

Watakushi shosetsu or *shi shosetsu* (the "I novel"): a form of first-person confessional novel that dominates *Taisho* and *Showa* fiction. Since nearly all major modern writers have explored this form or some variation of it, students will surely be familiar with the genre. All of them should know, at least, Dazai Osamu.

Getting Started in the Japanese Tradition

In the spring term 1992 I used examples from Japanese literature to help students in two classes at Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa Campus get started with their journal projects. Since this was an individually directed project, the group met together as a class only once, at the beginning of the term, to receive general instructions.

I used excerpts from *Makura no Soshi*, translated by Ivan Morris (1967) as *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*. I distributed to students passages from sections 14 and 16: "Hateful Things" and "Things That Make One's Heart Beat Faster". For example, hateful things:

One finds that a hair has got caught in the stone on which one is rubbing one's inkstick, or again that gravel is lodged in the inkstick,

making a nasty, grating sound....

I hate the sight of men in their cups who shout, poke their fingers in their mouths, stroke their beards, and pass on the wine to their neighbours with great cries of "Have some more! Drink up!" They tremble, shake their heads, twist their faces, and gesticulate like children who are singing, "We're off to see the Governor." I have seen really well-bred people behave like this and I find it most distasteful....

An admirer has come on a clandestine visit, but a dog catches sight of him and starts barking. One feels like killing the beast.

One has gone to bed and is about to doze off when a mosquito appears, announcing himself in a reedy voice. One can actually feel the wind made by his wings and, slight though it is, one finds it hateful in the extreme...(pp. 44-46).

And things that make one's heart beat faster:

Sparrows feeding their young. To pass a place where babies are playing. To sleep in a room where some fine incense has been burnt.... To wash one's hair, make one's toilet, and put on scented robes; even if not a soul sees one, these preparations still produce an inner pleasure...(p. 51).

Passages such as these exhibit the characteristics which I encourage students to try to achieve in their journal entries. They are characterized by a free flow of ideas and impressions. They are organized associatively rather than in terms of set logical or rhetorical patterns. They employ a loose grammatical structure. Above all, they are specific and detailed, and appeal to all the senses with frequent mention of sounds, odors, and physical sensations.

I stressed the ordinariness of the impressions Sei Shonagon has set down in order to make the point that *Makura no Soshi* has been in continuous publication for the past one thousand years not because it contains brilliant ideas or relates extraordinary experiences but because its author has observed the world around her closely and described it honestly and in specific detail. In fact, one need not have lived an exciting life in order to write good stuff. All of us have something to write about if we will only open our eyes and describe honestly and accurately what we see.

Students seemed to enjoy their first two assignments to write about their likes and dislikes following the model of *Makura no Soshi*. I enjoyed reading their entries. Here are some examples for a number of student journals:

Dislikes:

A salesman do not hung up the phone easily.
My mother's voice or the alarm's bell ring, awake me from great dream.
People who talk or eat at movie theater.
Red pimples on my face.
An eraser cannot rub out well and make black dirt on paper.
To miss the TV show I was truly looking forward to. To miss TV show's rerun too.
Dentists. I hate dentists! I was wearing braces a few years ago, and I had to go to the dentists once in two weeks. Our dentists is on the 5F of a building and you have to go on a lift to get there. As I am so frightened about dentists, my knees begin to wobble when I get on the lift. It has a smell that all dental clinics have, and you start hearing the squeaky noise by the time you've reached 4F. Ooh, it gives me the shivers!!
I don't know why but I don't like kids. I saw them running in the train and they talk so stupid things in loud. I don't know how many time I want to cry out and say, "Shut up, kids."
I hate when I don't feel good and there is a person near me eating or putting on perfume.
Many cherry blossom trees in spring is a scene enough to take your breath away. Why is it that when night falls, these same cherry blossoms suggest vulgarity and also seem to hint at sickness in the head.
The splashes you get on the back of your legs on rainy days.
People who make you wait, people who judge others by their appearance, people who are untidy, and most of all, anyone of a presumptuous personality is abominable just to think of!
Flat beer.

And Likes:

Birds sings from the big tree next to my bed room window.
Pleasant spring wind and smell especially when I was ridying a bi-cycle.
Reading the advertisements hanging from the ceiling of the train.
Unexpectedly delivered letters are that I am fond of greatly. Looking in the post box, inside letter from my old friends are so exciting. What happened to them? Fortune? Misfortune? The moment I take letters from paper bag beats my heart up!
I like to find red poisonous mashrooms when hiking in mountains. It makes me feel that I'm in nature.
Girls with thick lips or with lips that are stick out. I hope mine were

like that. I think it's sexy. And when they eat something, it looks good.

Boys with muscles are great. But not too much. I also like white short on dark skin.

I like the day of the week that I pack my face. I hope that the next day will be nice day for me.

When dirt pile up on the balcony of my house. I love it when I feel like I'm living close to nature.

When I sleep during class. It's thrilling.

The feeling when I put off my wristwatch, or shoes, or socks.

When I wash my hands after using the chalk.

Arranging to meet a friend is nice. As I walk towards the place I get excited and when I found the person I was to meet my face will get loosen.

When a little child in the train looks at me and smiles back.

When I hear my dog running down the stairs to meet me at the front door.

I was pleased with these responses. Although I have been assigning journals in writing classes in America, China and Japan for some years, this is the first time anyone has thought to write about erasers, flat beer, dust piling up on balconies, washing hands, packing one's face or taking off socks. I find these images fresh and sharp, but such topics only become available when students have the sanction of a respected model. It is only after they know that Sei Shonagon says it OK to write about a hair caught on an inkstone or having a shampoo that such subjects may be written about.

Where Does the Tradition Lead Us?

My argument here is that the journal is, finally, an artifact. Even the most personal and private thought or emotion, when written down, partakes of convention. By accepting that fact and being familiar with the convention, we will be better able to understand and guide our students to sharper perceptions and better writing. A student who listed as one of her "likes" the cliché "To walk under the full-blown cherry blossoms" is following a convention, but she can be lead to a higher level of self-awareness by reading another student's observation that "when night falls these same cherry blossoms suggest vulgarity and also seem to hint at sickness in the head." This student, too, is following a convention, albeit a more ironical one. Her perspective can be broadened by being informed that "previous to the Edo period people were afraid to walk under the cherry blossoms for fear that they would go mad" (Sakaguchi Ango, cited in Keene, 1984, p. 1079), a fact she may or may not have known.

As students become aware of themselves as working in a literary tradition, their subsequent journal entries may exhibit characteristics of that tradition. Instructors familiar with the tradition can encourage students to expand their range of topics by anticipating the sort of subjects the students may write about and the attitudes they may exhibit and by recognizing these topics and attitudes as traditional when they appear. Once again, it is only by recognizing what is conventional that we can identify what is original and fresh.

Among the conventional topics or attitudes that students in this class developed in their journals were themes of love, travel, battles, personal revelation and *aware*.

Love

One student continued to write about her likes and dislikes in subsequent journals. Taking her cue from Sei Shonagon, both in subject matter and personal manner, she wrote about her boy friend and presented herself as rather imperious and demanding. But she succeeded in revealing a thoroughly modern and original mind:

I like my boyfriend looking me in back seat of his car using back-mirror. He eyes look nicer in the mirror.

I like him when he hold my hand softly waiting for the traffic light to change. Moreover, its nice when he kisses my hand and smile at me.

I like him waiting for me outside my house or in other places. He had never blamed me for being late. However, I don't like him being late, and I often ask him for a make up. He usually obey my request.

I don't like him complain. It's better if he complains looking into my eyes with his mouth sticking out, because I can forgive him for being cute. The one thing I don't like is the real complaint, mumbling some words looking somewhere else. I get so irritated, and it usually lead us fighting. But I think he's so patient because whenever our fighting begins, he just stop complaining and keep silent. I always yell at him, "Why don't you say something?!" but he only answers "I can't say anything" or "You are right." Sometimes I really want a word, a nice one, and his silence makes me upset, but after all his silence makes me feel that he's more mature than I am....

I like his hair standing up although he thinks it's better having his hair down. I like him looking sporty than smart. I like his skin tanned black, and I like him looking tall and good proportion. I like

his egg-shaped face because I hate my round (square) face and it has been my complex. I just love to touch his oval face line. I think it's neat. It will be better if he lose some weight and get rid of fat round his waist, but I shouldn't say that because I have the same thing around my stomach and legs.

Travel: Poets on the Road

Since *nikki bungaku* often overlaps *kiko bungaku* (prose writing on travel themes), it was not surprising to find students working in this tradition writing about travel. Of course, given the opportunities and inclinations of modern Japanese college students to journey abroad, one would naturally expect travel to appear as a topic in journals. But in some cases, the correspondences between journal descriptions of travel and classical Japanese travel literature were close enough to suggest that the writer might even be deliberately working the tradition.

One student is a member of a rock band. During Golden Week he took his band on the road. His detailed description of the trip, covering several weeks of journal entries, was similar both in specific detail and in overall tone to Basho's *Oku no hosomichi*. Like Basho the student sets his travel in a large philosophical framework. Like Basho, he makes an obligatory reference to Mt. Fuji at the beginning. Like Basho, he encounters a variety of people in his travels. And like Basho, he presents a message of tolerance and compassion. In addition, he develops an implied definition of art and response very close to the affective-expressive tradition of classical Japanese literature: the dramatic moment comes when a member of the audience joins the band and plays along with it.

On Golden Week vacation I went to play on the road with my band. For 3 days we went out of Tokyo towards the west of Tokaido. I'm taking the part of vocals in the band. Since I've been wondering why do people try to express something against someone. I've been thinking through times, but thinking was no good for me. So we made a plan to go out on the streets to express. Not in the dark, small, smoky live houses.

First we went to Shizuoka. We started our trip by viewing the horizon of Mt. Fuji from Nihon-Daira. We slept there for about 2 hours. And after that we headed from somewhere we can play, along the sea.

And we found one place along the road along the sea called strawberry line. So anyway we started to set up our equipments. It was before noon, and on the beach there were people playing piecefully.

It was a kind of a challenge for us, because nobody knows us, nobody know our songs, and nobody even don't know what we were trying to do.

First we were little bit too nervose. It's so interesting that these bad vibrations will surely be handed down upon the listeners. It was not an expression, it was only like throwing a stone against a concrete wall. Expression is love. At first we did not have any space in our hearts for that love.... Only making or trying to make a slite difference in our feelings things will totally change. People became to enjoy our play and started to communicate with us. This very moment I cannot forget and that is the reason why I sing.

Next day we headed back toward the east....We arrived at Enoshima in the evening, about six o'clock. There were not much time so we quickly made up our sets and started. In the dark sea our song started wailing.... Soon people came to see our play. People on the car raised their hands. People sitting on the ground was moving their body....

One man was first looking at us. This man was a little bit wiered. Suddenly this man came to me and started to talk with his hands. Yes, he could not hear. He told me that he want to play the drum. And he also said that he can hear or feel the beat. I said yes please. He started to make some noise with the drum. His beat was not a kind of proper beat or any beat. But he was feeling and try to express something.... The surrounding people could not understand this sound since there were no form. But even if I tried, I could not kill my feeling of compassion against this man. I wanted to feel equal with the man and share the same feeling, but I was not ready for that.

So after this trip, we ended up in an answer that we should keep playing in the streets as well as live houses. It was a very beginning, and good start for us.

Battles

The following description of the Tama River Battle may sound familiar to readers of *The Tale of Heike* and other traditional battle tales, which frequently begin with an inventory of weaponry and naming of the warriors.

Now I would like to go on to the story of my kindergarten period (the fighting period)

1. water gun
2. rubber bans
3. faked cockroaches
4. fire-crackers
5. candies and bubble gum

These were the five secret weapons that I and my gang carried along together. I always hung around the park and the Tama River with members of the gang. There were 5 members in the gang, we named ourselves the 'crazy monkeys' We, our mission was to scare people. We threw faked cockroaches at people whom we thought (at that time) were enemies of our town.

We often had troubles, when we threw rubber bans at the kids, who came from next town. But having a trouble between a kindergarden is like having a game with your babies.

The biggest fight we had was the one at the Tama River. The numbers were 10 against 10. Our town vs. the next town. We were fighting for the continent of small lobsters, where you can get fishes and small animals easily. We used water guns and other unknown weapons that were never dangerous to our bodies. We did not win or lose because the fight lasted for about an hour, and sun was already gone, with our hungry stomach.

One of the enemies said, that he wanted to go home, because he's hungry and was scared that he would get a slap on his tits, if he was late. So, the fight was over with no winners but only a few kids who was scared that their parents would get angry for being late.

There were other incidents also, that is very and too embarrassing to write, but I would say it was a period of joy.

Personal Revelations and the "I Novel"

All students writing journals to an instructor whom they have come to trust, are likely to reveal themselves openly. Japanese students working in the tradition of the "I novel" may be especially prone to do so. Sometimes these revelations can be embarrassing to read. At times they are extremely poignant. At times they may be a plea for help. Often they place severe demands upon the instructor's sympathy and understanding.

The tradition of the "I novel", which so profoundly influenced modern fiction in Japan, was defined by Kume Masao in 1925: "The foundation of all art is 'I.' If we can accept this as true, it follows that a work that has honestly expressed that 'I,' without any disguise—what in prose is called the 'I novel'—clearly must

constitute the mainstream of art, its foundation, its essence" (Keene, 1984, p. 511). The honest expression of "I" without any disguise came to require some writers to compete in writing increasingly specific, frequently painful, and occasionally unpleasant revelations of their depravity and utter lack of worth. This tradition has had a profound effect upon modern literature in Japan. Even if it is possible to find a student who has never heard of the "I novel", I doubt we could find one who is not indirectly touched by the tradition, if only through such secondary manifestations of it as the public apologies and self-criticisms offered by disgraced political figures.

A reader with some knowledge of that tradition will be better prepared to put journal revelations in perspective and better able to respond by recognizing that the journal entry is *both* personal and conventional, both a personal confession and a public piece of literature. The essential element of the "I novel" confession seems to be an inclination to blame all one's troubles upon one's own lack of worth. If the reader recognizes that as a convention, then entries like the following can be dealt with as literary artifact as well as raw human anguish. No matter how we define our role as readers of and respondents to journals—whether as writing teacher, psychological counselor, or friend—a degree of emotional and esthetic distance is valuable for understanding and helping. Recognizing that highly personal experience is being conveyed by a conventional vehicle, and understanding that the vehicle itself dictates the criteria for selection of what is to be told and what is to be suppressed, we are better able to realize that no matter how detailed an account we may read, it is never more than a shadow of the total reality. Without such an insight we might assume that the journal does, in fact, present the whole true story, which would be a blunder no matter what role the reader takes.

In saying this, I do not mean to diminish the suffering of students who reveal themselves in their journals. Their suffering is real for all of its being expressed in conventional forms. Dazai was not kidding, after all. He did commit suicide. Recognizing the vehicle carrying the emotion aids in understanding.

I haven't talked with my mother friendly for more than a week. It seems so much that she is dreadfully annoyed by everything I do or say these days. She doesn't even believe what I'm saying, and says: "You just don't want to admit that you did notice the letter be side the washbasin." I really didn't... I just asked my mother why she didn't just tell me about it, and she got furious.

However, I do admit that my mother is definitely not wrong totally. I know that I can't blame her for her behavior. It so happens that I am not so clever and I'm not considerate enough about housework. She doesn't like me sitting at the table after meal, thinking about something with a stupid face.

"Wash the dishes if you have time to break that chair with your

heavy bottom." Yes. It is true that I'm far from being thin. I'm rather like a pig. So the fact that something fat like a dumb pig is sitting nearby irritates our relationship....

I understand her feelings, but I can't 100 percent quite make up why she has to get so crazy and annoyed about me. Even if we say that parents love their children equally, it is so true that there are 2 types of children: Those that are cute and adorable that one just can't scold them, and those that just have the sense to make one lose his/her temper. I know that I am the latter type. But I can't help it, because it happens to be that that is my way of showing myself outside. I'm not 100 percent doing it on purpose. But I understand it annoys my parents.

I don't know if I can speak with my mother like before again, but one thing I know is that I can die for her any time, because I love my mommy.

Mono No Aware

Aware appears as an adjective no fewer than 1,018 times in *The Tale of Genji* (Varley, 1986, p. 62), and the concept of *mono no aware* has been central to the Japanese esthetic since at least the Heian period. Originally the term seems to denote a sensitivity to things, the capacity to be moved by what one sees and experiences. Since much of Japanese art focuses on the impermanence of natural beauty and exhibits an acute awareness of the passage of time, *mono no aware* has come to be colored by feelings of melancholy. A student wrote this striking example:

There is a pigeon's nest outside my window. It is in a tree that stands between my house and my neighbor's house. Right now, it is empty.

I didn't notice it until last summer. One morning I woke up and a pigeon was cooing loudly. It was very early, but it was so loud that I couldn't get back to sleep. I decided to find out where the sound was coming from. I opened the window and there he was, sitting in a nest made of twigs, calling for a mate. My eyes met with his, and we stared at each other for a few seconds until he suddenly flew away.

For the next few days, the pigeon woke me up very early in the morning with his call. Unfortunately for him, he couldn't find a mate. So in a week or so he flew away and didn't come back for a few months.

The pigeon came back last March. He woke me up again early in the morning. This time he found a mate. I looked out the window one morning and there was a pair of pigeons, one sitting in the nest and the other on the branch. Again their eyes met with mine, and they flew away. Since then he stopped crying.

A few days later, the pigeon laid eggs. She would sit on them, and she wouldn't move even if I stared at her.

A few days after that, I looked out the window and found the nest empty. It seems that the neighbor's cat ate the eggs for lunch the day before.

The pigeons haven't returned since. I wonder if they would ever come back.

My argument once again: If we know the writer is Japanese working within a Japanese tradition, we need not necessarily assume that this nineteen-year-old is really sunk in personal melancholy and *Weltschmerz*.

Tradition and the Writing Instructor

The use of models from Japanese literature worked to help my students produce some lively and interesting journal entries at the beginning of the course. I was both pleased and surprised to discover that in some cases subsequent journal entries appeared to derive in some ways from Japanese literary tradition, even though I had not systematically attempted to move the whole class in that direction. In the future, I think I might, in fact, do just that, distributing copies of student writing and relevant literary models to the entire class. But, as I hope the examples cited above will illustrate, even this modest beginning in attempting to fit students into the tradition has helped them find a vehicle for the expression of their individual ideas. In addition, by attempting to locate a source for some of these ideas, I have been encouraged to make the effort to increase my own knowledge of that tradition.

Just as a writer's work may become more sophisticated, more meaningful, and even more original when the author begins to become conscious of the tradition in which he is working, so our instruction may become more meaningful and better focused if we familiarize ourselves with the tradition within which our students are writing. It is not merely a matter of finding culturally relevant models for composition. Much more importantly, it is a matter of helping the student achieve self-consciousness as a writer.

Whether our main motive in assigning journals is to help the students to discover themselves or to help them improve their writing, it is desirable to lead them to a higher level of self-awareness. By pointing out to students the parallels with tradition which occur in their writing we can lead them to the sources of

their current ideas and thus help them achieve independence. No culture is inherited, of course. But the ways in which we learn our native culture are so pervasive and overwhelming that much of the learning is subliminal. We are apt to perceive our culture not as a system founded on a thousand or so years of individual thought and social and political choice, but as a monolithic system which is "just the way things are": eternal and immutable. Discovering sources and making them available for inspection, reasoned analysis and criticism is a step toward freeing ourselves from the tyranny that the past wields over us.

In this way we can help our students improve their writing skills, discover themselves, and fulfill the highest goals of a liberal education. In addition, if we are lucky and worthy, we may elicit some genuinely interesting journal entries.

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Reader-Response Journals

Peter Silver

A recent poll by the English department at SFC asked professors from all disciplines what they considered to be the most important English skill for their students. The overwhelming majority of those who responded said that it was the ability to read, a result which is scarcely surprising. The importance of reading accounts, if only obliquely, for the great weight colleges place on the English section of the entrance exam. Japanese middle and junior middle schools, preoccupied with preparing students to pass these examinations, for six years stress reading as the most important skill in the English curriculum. This largely to the exclusion of speaking and listening. Yet as Professor Shigeo Imamura, Acting President of JALT, observed (1991), Japanese students are not only unable to speak English—understandable in light of their lack of training in this area—but they are also not very good at reading it.

What Professor Imamura was perhaps implying is that there is more to reading than the passive decoding of bits of information. Good readers do not just decode but take control of what they read: They think about it; they disagree with it; they add to it and they shape it and they take the results into their framework of knowledge. Many teachers in Japan place the blame for their students' inability to read squarely on the entrance examinations themselves (Berwick & Ross, 1989), where the narrow range of skills tested has less to do with assessing the kinds of proficiency that students will need for academic work than with screening too many students for too few college openings.

In this paper I will discuss how the examination system has encouraged learning practices that have misdirected the reading efforts of Japanese students, and I will also suggest a theoretical position leading to a practical method that may help students read more actively.

Two Models of Reading: Transmission and Transaction

Since it is the responsibility of high schools to ensure that students pass college entrance exams, classes are tutored in ways to achieve high scores. Old exams are reviewed, questions and answers carefully scrutinized. Students learn that questions will be confined to aspects of the language that are easily tested (Berwick & Ross, 1989) and scored. Ambiguity is thus shunned and test items with more than one correct answer are, of course, an impossibility. Students discover that the best strategy is to skim a text with the question in mind so that answers may be retrieved with a minimum of actual reading time lost. Indeed, Graves and Holnes (1990) find evidence suggesting that candidates sitting for

many college entrance exams may achieve higher scores when they don't read the text at all; this is because questions themselves, often written in Japanese, give cues to answers that would otherwise be difficult to find. Even among better designed exams, it is not necessary, or even advisable, to grasp the meaning of the text as a whole since answers may be found in individual sentences. This brings about a condition in which a reader is able "to highlight key points but is insensitive to the relation between the points" (Kennedy, 1980, p. 134). Because students apply a certain subset of reading skills from the entire range of things that good readers do with a text they "approach reading tasks passively, look for stated ideas, miss implied relationships, ignore the possibility of multiple meanings and fail to monitor understanding with any sense of control" (Kirby, et al., 1986, p. 13).

I have been describing what happens when pedagogy is more concerned with helping students to get the right answer than in helping them to read. Such focus on product has a negative effect on not only reading but, if we are to agree with Frager and Molina (1986), on learning generally since "effective reading and study presupposes an active interest in learning on the student's part." The authors cite with approval Donlan's view of reading as " 'active comprehension' becoming a confident and independent learner is an important developmental aspect of reading maturity" (p. 36). Independent learners do more than simply decode meanings: They also seek answers to questions that come about as the result of their own inquiries. This activity, which is crucial for academic success, is discouraged by the examination system where students practice the docile acceptance of solutions that have been worked out by someone else beforehand.

But a more serious outcome of a product-oriented approach involves not simply what it leaves out. For those students who do not succeed in terms of external criteria, as Zamel (1992) observes, "the difficulties, ambiguities, and confusions they are wrestling with are necessarily the sign of a problem that resides in them...They come to understand that what they do seem to get is not important...they become afraid, they cease to take risks" (p. 466). Anything less than complete understanding of every detail in a text is regarded as a degree of failure.

These are some of the unhappy consequences of entrance examinations and they can be traced to a model of reading which supposes that coded on the page are the potential thoughts of an author ready for transmission into the minds of persons with knowledge of the code. A *transmission* model of reading neglects the important fact that the construction of a text and its deconstruction are a different species of activity. The author, as Chaplin (1982) notes, "exercises his or her authority in the production of the text, but once the text is completed, it must stand on its own" (p. 150). The reader of a text, unlike its author, *begins* with a pattern of verbal signs which must be related to his or her own experience, purpose and expectations (Rosenblatt, 1978). A transmission model of reading leads readers to think of an author's meaning as "something contained in the text or something that exists 'out there' rather than something that results when

a reader finds a way to make the representation of meaning possible" (Zamel, 1992, p. 464). As Zamel is suggesting, the transmission model of reading fails to consider the active part, now widely acknowledged, that a reader plays in the actual construction of meaning. Smith has pointed out that "reading involves the mixture or interaction of information that the reader receives through his visual system and information that he already has available in his head, behind his eyeballs" (in Chaplin, 1982, p. 152). The result of this interaction is a selective understanding of what is personally important and relevant; there can be no one-to-one correspondence between what an author meant and what a reader understands.

Rosenblatt (1978) rejects the use of term "interaction" to describe what happens between the reader and the text since this implies a duality that is not actually part of the reading process. Instead, she uses the term "transaction" since it designates an "ongoing process" in which the reader and the text are "aspects of the total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning each other" (p. 17). Rosenblatt adds an important thought:

The essence of transaction between readers and text is the involvement of the reader's consciousness in the creation of meaning. The art of reading is to locate within the verbal symbols referents to which the reader can relate his/her past experience (p. 152).

When readers transact with a text they are in the center and in control of their reading experience. Rather than standing outside the text in a search for facts and the single, unequivocal interpretation demanded of the "correct answer," readers discover that ambiguities, so carefully avoided by test makers, are resonant with possibilities for meaning; multiple interpretations do not sound the alarm for a wrong answer but suggest different ways of looking at things. Dependence gives way to independence, and insecurity to confidence, as students discover that their ideas count.

In this section I have distinguished a transmission model of reading from a transactional one. I said that while a transmission model regards meaning as something left behind in a text by its author, a transactional view acknowledges the contribution readers make to establish meaning in light of their previous knowledge, feelings, opinions and conceptions of the world. The examination system in Japan is informed by a transmission model, which at best is of limited use and at worst damaging to a student's sense of self worth. The transactional model, on the other hand, encourages reading confidence and independence. Thus the issue for those of us who teach in Japan at college level is how to help our students read transactionally.

Reader-Response Journals

"The best reading," as Blanchard (1987) notes, "occurs when there is a strong personal engagement with the text," (p. 11) and this can happen when students write about their reading. Kirby et al. (1986) agree, saying that "writing about reading forces students out of passive involvement into an attitude of active participation" (p. 14).

In North America observations concerning the effectiveness of writing as an interface for reading are familiar to discussions of first language reading programs and ESL literacy. For teachers of reading to ESL students at the college level, however, there has been far less attention given to the possibility that writing helps reading. Although it has been a nearly unquestioned assumption that to help themselves to write, students must read, the sorts of writing exercises offered in ESL reading texts occur, as Zamel (1992) observes, at the ends of chapters, "thus reinforcing the notion that writing is done as a final activity after the text has been read, analyzed, worked through, rather than used as a means for understanding the text" (p. 486).

The value of reader response journals is that they do not represent a finished product; instead, they must be regarded as a heuristic which can help in the process of making meaning. "Writing about reading," says Kennedy is the true test of comprehension....When the student frames even the simplest sentence, he is forced to establish a set of meaningful relations; that is, he is forced to think more clearly" (p. 138). This may be because, as Kirby, et al. (1986) suggest, writing "separates our ideas from ourselves in a way that is easiest for us to examine, explore and develop" (p. 14). The phenomenon owes, perhaps, to the "permanence and detachability" (Casanave, forthcoming) of text-based knowledge which allows writers to "reflect on it, to analyze it, pull it apart and put it back together in new ways."

Kennedy (1980) describes a rather different way in which writing may help reading. In terms of Piaget's "activity principle," when we ask our students to set down on paper their thoughts about a text, they act on it in a tangible way rather than simply receiving it passively. Zamel (1992) says that an active response to print will make students aware of how they are responding to the text, thus providing them with

the sense that experienced readers have when they read. Though we may not always respond in writing to our texts, when we underline portions of texts, mark them up, stop and verbalize our reactions or scribble marginal comments, we are using interpretive strategies that give us insight into our meaning making (p. 470).

Teachers describe various ways that journals can be used. Berthoff (1987), for example, recommends "dialectical notebooks." A page is divided in half, and on one side writers write their "observations, sketches, noted impressions" etc., and on the other side of the page, responses to their responses. Berthoff

believes that by encouraging students to take notes on their own notes, it "helps them learn to interpret their interpretations deliberately and cogently; it fosters the habit of questioning which is, of course, at the heart of inquiry and argumentation" (p.15). Petrosky (in Kirby, et al., 1986) suggests that students complete such sentence starters as "This was an important book/article to read because..." or "The writer seemed biased in his view because..." Some teachers (Kirby, et al., 1986; Casanave, forthcoming) suggest that students address in their journals such general questions as: "What does the text say?" and "What do I feel or think about it?" to help them focus on ideas.

Although readers may use these techniques on their own, reader response journals may be most valuable when they are shared. Peyton and Staton (1991) call shared reader response journals "dialogue journals." Some teachers (Kirby, et al., 1986; Rupert & Breuggeman, 1986) encourage students to share their interpretations with other students since "this can help them understand the possibility of multiple meanings from the same text. Readers must be challenged to seek varied interpretations and to stretch their process for creating meaning" (Kirby et al., p.16). Students thus learn to take their uncertainty about meaning not as a caution against marking the wrong answer but rather as a green light for exploration.

When journals are shared with teachers, not only do students gain insight into the way they read but they also provide paths for intervention. Petrosky (in Kirby et al 1986) says that "writing about reading is one of the best ways to get students to unravel their transactions so that we can see how they understand and, in the process, help them to elaborate, clarify and illustrate their responses by reference to the associations and prior knowledge that inform them" (p. 14). By the word "help" Petrosky is not suggesting that teachers adjudicate between a reader's response and any particular interpretation but rather that students be counselled in ways of building a coherent response to the text.

In dialogue journals, help does not have to come directly from a teacher; it can also come indirectly. By preparing journals with an audience in mind, students come to consider how their reader will respond to what they have written and this, according to some teachers, will improve reading in ways that journals written privately cannot. Zamel (1992) suggests that if reading journals are prepared for an audience, students "can begin to imagine their own writing as a potential for reading" and so realize that they "must help guide readers of their own texts...this gives them insight into the way reading and writing work in tandem to promote and enhance one another" (p. 481). Dolly (1990) maintains a similar view and adds that for students who are accustomed to looking for "the right answer" dialogue journals can help bring about the realization that the views of authors, like those of their journal partners, may be challenged, questioned and disagreed with.

Dialogue journals (Peyton & Staton, 1991) are widely used in adult second language literacy programs. The situation for those of us teaching college students in Japan is different for many reasons, one important but less obvious

reason being that unlike with literacy students for whom "learning to use the written word effectively turns out to be far more difficult, and far less successful...than does learning spoken English" (Peyton & Staton 1991, p. xv), many college students in Japan, whose spoken English is nearly nonexistent, find the written word the only way to communicate. As one of my journal writers put it, "I still can't speak English but I can write my feelings." Yet despite the differences between literacy and college level readers, insights into literacy reading suggest further rationales for using reader response journals in our college classes. Peyton and Staton (1991) observe that in dialogue interactions students will develop "the internal 'self-talk' that a competent person uses to guide his or her own activity...Such self talk involves the metacognitive strategies that successful readers and writers use to make sense out of print and to connect thoughts with written words" (p. xvi). In addition, dialogue journals between teachers and students encourage a strong personal engagement in the text as the partners work to clarify their views to one another. Peyton and Staton cite Freire's view that genuine learning situations require an "I-Thou relationship between two subjects who are equals with different kinds of knowledge." When teacher and student cooperate in dialogue journals, their interaction "creates a context of equality and power symmetry that leads to trust between student and teacher or tutor" (p. xv) and so fosters in students the confidence they need to become "risk-takers." Such a context is also important if we recall a point made earlier in this section, that reading intervention is best provided in the form of counseling.

From Theory to Practice

I have given a rationale for the use of reader response journals in Japanese college classrooms and in so doing I have touched on some principles and procedures that teachers have developed in their reading classes. In this section I will discuss how I used reader response journals with my low proficiency readers at SFC.

SFC's Guided Study course offered what were in many ways ideal circumstances for dialogue journals. Because this course was designed primarily for self study and so scheduled attendance was not necessary, students would be able to use the time to read extensively and give some thought to journals. In addition I would have time to respond to things students said about their reading.

As Casanave (forthcoming) cautions, finding appropriate reading material is a problem since students have widely varying backgrounds. She suggests that the teacher select readings that "are built around an issue that can provoke interest, even if the specifics of the topic do not suit all students equally." Yet for my extremely low-level class, locating a variety of texts on a specific topic would have been extremely time consuming, if not impossible. An alternative would have been to allow students to choose from anything written in English

that interested them. This would have been impractical for two reasons. Given the limited abilities of my students it would be unreasonable for me to expect them each week to choose from the world of available texts ones which were at once interesting and accessible. As another reason, if I were to be effective in my dialogue with students I would have to be familiar with what they had read.

After considering a number of alternatives I decided on an ESL reader matching, in my view, Nuttall's (1982) criteria that it be appealing, easy, short and varied. In addition, it met my own criterion of containing "authentic" readings, that is, ones not written especially for language learners. Although some of the articles in *Something to Read I* (Lundop & Fisher, 1990) had been edited, the authors made clear where editing had occurred. The thirty-two readings had been arranged into three main sections according to order of difficulty. Thus students of even the least proficiency would have the choice of finding enough readings at the right level for them. As to the nature of the readings, most were from popular magazines and newspapers.

I told students that they could read any of the texts in the book, in any order they wished so long as they read one text each week. Thus out of the thirty-two readings, students could select any thirteen, regardless of level of difficulty. I prepared guidelines encouraging students to relate their reading to their lives by offering opinions, describing things from their pasts which had bearing on the texts or comparing life in Japan with what the texts had to say about life in Europe and America. If students found a particular portion of a text interesting, they could focus on it in their journals. In short, the class could do anything it wanted except summarize the texts. I shared Browning's (1986) view that reactions to texts involve students more than summaries do since the former requires interpretation while summaries involve a special skill more akin to translation. Since the focus of this course was reading, not formal writing, I told students that I was not looking for grammatical accuracy, and moreover, that I would not even point out grammatical errors. Evaluation would be based strictly on the number of journals submitted "according to the standards of this course," by which I meant that students needed to write the minimum of 250 words per entry (an arbitrary number which I hoped would mean not too much work but would still give students the range to develop their ideas), and that the journals should be handed in on time. The quality of journals themselves was not important since they were not intended to be finished products. And because I was not interested in finished products, I strongly agreed with Kirby, et al., (1986), that reader response journals must be "a safe place to experiment with expressing thoughts in writing" (p. 17). Yet I also agreed with Nuttall (1982) that student responses should not "ignore textual evidence; they do not rely only on the reader, but essentially involve him with the writer" (p. 133). Part of my role as dialogue partner would be to maintain the journal as a "safe place to experiment" while at the same time to impress upon students the importance of staying involved with "the writer—or in our terms, their own transactions. This was not always easy since a number of students seemed

unable to distinguish between writing about a text as it related to their lives and writing about their lives—period.

To take one example, in the textbook article ‘A camel or a car,’ the authors argue in dead-pan humor that the camel is the better means of transportation. Since anything about automobiles is certain to stimulate interest among 18-year-olds, nearly all students made it the subject of their journals. A number of students seized it as an opportunity to describe the vehicles they had or wished they had. The following excerpt is typical:

My ways of travelling is motorcycle. The motorcycle is my most favorite, I love it. But now I have no rider's license and motorcycle. Because I was caught by police when I had my riders license suspended for 60 days...Anyway my motorcycle was a on-road model 400cc. This motorcycle needs roads. But next time, I will buy a off road model, it doesn't need roads. In this part it is more excellent than a car, and is equal to a camel.

Among the 250 words in his journal entry, the last sentence here is Kouji's single reference to the article.

Lack of involvement in reading may have been in part because the course did not provide enough structure for passive students accustomed to translating and answering comprehension questions (Nuttall, 1982). Other students may have found in the freedom the course offered an opportunity to beat the system. By using the titles of articles to produce thoughtless journals, these students were merely employing a strategy that had guided them previously: “Read as little as possible”.

Still other students did not like the choices that the textbook gave them. As a final journal assignment, I asked students to evaluate various aspects of the course. This is what some said about the book:

I can write journal willingly about story of the book what is interest topics for me. But after I have choosed all interest story, I had difficulty in writing journal.

But I think that book is too bad. Because I am not interested in each topic. It is not fun to read...maybe you can pick up a better book, which is more interesting. I think even if the book is too difficult, but it is too fun to read, it is O.K.

I don't like this book so much. Because there are few article I interested in. So I found hardly interesting article last time. I want to write thing I want to write instead of writing about article in this book

I had anticipated the question of interest to some extent when I told students that they could write about any aspect of an article that they would like. Because writing about a text is also thinking about it, students could draw out of

otherwise uninteresting material ideas worthy of attention. But readers must also be willing to think about a text in order to write about it. And while I do not wish to belittle the importance of the students' comments, the *sine qua non* that texts be "fun to read" may preclude the possibility of students discovering things of interest. The culprit is once again the Examination, from whose pointless rigors students widely regard college as a period of recuperation (Berwick & Ross, 1989).

I mention these considerations in order to caution teachers that journals are not a panacea. But I do not wish to leave the impression that most students did not like the readings or that they did not deal with the texts in substantial ways. The following opinions from the final journal stand in contrast to the previous assessments:

I like the book which has many interesting topics and I could imagine many things from the topic

Through writing journals I remember back on my experiences and have an opinion on every field.

The topic in the book was difficult. I don't want to read it. This was my first impression. This impression made me think writing journals is hard. But every week I write one journal. It makes writing English easier and easier. And that reading a topic in the book is interesting. I want to read it

These comments illustrate that students bring both imagination and experience to their reading and suggest that interest in reading may indeed build from writing about it.

For a number of students like Genzou, the effort may appear to be slight. Genzou concurred that camels may indeed be cheaper and last longer than cars but were nevertheless "not suitable for Japan" since

there aren't the space, the camels should live. And Japanese road is very crowded everytime. If the camels walk along the road. It is very dangerous.

Toward the end the journal fritters off into a telling of how its writer likes to play his radio loud and drive his car fast. Yet the difference between this journal and the one that Kouji wrote is that Genzou has challenged the author in light of his own knowledge about Japan. Keeping in mind the sort of reading that Japanese students are accustomed to, Genzou's response, drawing as it does on his own knowledge to weigh the value of the author's opinions, represents the beginnings of critical evaluation. In my comments to Genzou, I encouraged him to return to the text to elaborate his ideas.

Like Genzou, Sadaharu challenges the author, but because he maintains his focus, his transactions, which seem to unfold across the page of his journal,

allow him to find deeper meaning in the text. I have maintained the student's spelling and punctuation to provide a sense of the spontaneity of the journal. Sadaharu begins by picking a quarrel with the ridiculous claims of the author:

I use a car. This book sead CARS ARE expensive. But I don't think it. First I think camel is expensive about mentenance of cost. And trouble is big. Feed cost and trouble. And car don't have ill.

He pummels away at the author's assertions point by point until, perhaps feeling a little silly, he grows to realize that he's been duped:

If this writer recommend camel serious this writers head was broken...*(the elipsis is Sadaharu's)*

The tumblers fall audibly into place. He knew it all along:

Of course I understand its nonsense. I am interstiong this page to read. I suggest to write "Marjang is very healthy game", because all night marjang play only healthy people

He reaches into his experience for something he has recently learned (to judge from an uncharacteristically sophisticated lexical item):

I interested in sophistry. "Airplane is safer tham car" Because airplain happen accident establish of one per 500000km. But I don't think airplain is safety. I think plain accident happen one par 200000 hours.

After explaining this piece of sophistry, Sadaharu asks me for advice, not about how to interpret the text since he'd already done that on his own, but in a way that attempts to use me as a resource for learning:

But in Japan sophistry book is so little. Pleas tell me if you know it. And easy to read.

Sadaharu, it seems to me, had quite fully exploited the implications of this article. Genzou, on the other hand, had only begun to tap its potential.

For Tageru, the text is fuel for philosophical speculation. While apparently missing the humor of the article, he does grasp the fallacy:

The author of this article compare a camel and a car from the economical viewpoint. I doubt why we can compare a camel and a car on the same scale.

In addition, he teases out and builds upon its ironic subtext (though in confused fashion), namely, that we in the industrialized world should not be so smug about our advances since we have lost something essential of our humanity.

I like a camel when I am alone, and I like a car when I am with somebody. Anyway, I like travels, because I like progressing. So I like nomadic intellect. Many West Modernism was based on settle intellect and it lost relativity. So in order to get it we have to travel and we have to get nomadic intellect... This article was written by human point of view, but if we continue to have this viewpoint, we will be faced with a limit of this viewpoint. So we have to viewpoint shift, or paradigm shift. So if this article was written from the camel's point of view, this article would be one of the best in the world.

Tageru's last sentence is the sort of thing that teachers hope will happen but almost never does. He has become so interested in his topic that he wants to pursue it, and he even suggests the heuristic that will help him. Although I had not planned the course with rewriting in mind, I told Tageru I would give him "credit" against his next assignment if he wrote, as he suggests, from the camel's point of view.

I am a camel. I still have no name. I always wonder why human are so busy, especially who live in advanced nation. I like calm. The time in my world is stream very slowly. So I think that I and human are living in same real-world but we must be living in different mental-world.

The second version, in which Tageru clarified the sense of loss, is rich in suggestion, more focussed and incisive. Like Kouji, Tageru seems less involved with the writer than with expressing his own ideas. The difference between Tageru's journal and Kouji's, I think, is that Tageru has gone beyond the text in his response while Kouji has failed to approach it. It may seem at this point that I am crediting my interpretations of these student texts with the same sort of objective reality that I have been arguing that text does not contain. While for teachers this may be unavoidable, we nevertheless interpret at our peril. Zamel (1992) cites White, who similarly cautions that in interpreting student-produced texts we may be relying on a transmission model of reading while at the same time espousing a transactional one. Thus in our comments to students we may be sending conflicting messages. Moreover, when teachers maintain a transmission model when they read student texts they tend to be on the lookout for preferred interpretations. Although my grading policy served as a safety feature against the most serious consequences of this prejudice, nevertheless, on more than one occasion I may have thwarted students in coming to terms with their own thoughts.

As a case in point, the article "A New Family," which tells the problems a couple have in adopting a child, got Jun to thinking unaccountably about horse racing. As his journal draws to a close, however, Jun says that once he picks a three-year-old contender, his sense of obligation toward the horse transcends whether the animal wins or loses. At the end he writes,

I have no child. But the feeling above is somewhat like parents' love of their children, I think. My parents don't order me. But I must try to make my parents glad.

He had used an article which had little relevance to his own life as a springboard to reflect on concerns which did. However, Jun had not, at least in my view at the time, engaged the text in a way that would allow him to carefully consider the issues involved and to seek support for his views. I explained to Jun that he might get more out of his reading if he were to write his journal entry again, and this time to think about what it would be like to raise a child which was not only not your own but, like the baby in the article, was of a different race. I was gratified to find Jun's revision referring back to the text frequently. He mentions that he doubts the sincerity of the couple who claim they love the child as if it were their own and wonders what will happen when the child realizes that his color is different from his parents. This drew from me sincere disagreements on every point—disagreements not about the correct answer to a reading exercise but disagreements about real issues; Jun, neither the textbook writer nor the teacher, had set the agenda. I was satisfied. But was Jun? I later wondered if Jun's first journal, so far removed from the text as it appeared, had not followed tributaries of thought which were invisible to me. He had, after all, consciously forged a connection between very incongruous subjects. Had I simply cued him to write a predictably "good" journal which I could authorize more easily?

This brings me to my own criticisms of the course and some suggestions for teachers who might want to use journals in their own classes. Firstly, while I do not question that the course would have benefitted from a wider selection of readings and a larger role for students in choosing them, I do not regard this as the central issue that some students did. Rather the fault (so far as it was within my power to control) was in my not being able easily to allow my dialogue with students to continue beyond a single exchange. Although reader response journals can be written without a partner, I doubt that students took up on their own initiative suggestions I made to them. Yet we have seen how students can take advantage of the opportunity to develop their ideas. If the dialogue about each text could continue for two or three exchanges (or alternatively, this could be done at certain intervals), the problem of lack of reader interest that I mentioned at the beginning of this section could possibly be resolved. A serious consideration here, however, is that an increased number of journal exchanges would entail a trade-off in the number of texts that students may be asked to read.

Another direction would be for SFC students to write and respond to other students through the computer network, and so involve them in ways that Rupert and Breuggeman (1986) urge are beneficial. It should be noted, however, that journal writing is not the only way to encourage students to read more actively; a comprehensive reading program would do well to include guided

intensive reading (Nuttall, 1982) as well.

What I hope students learned from the course I have described is what Berthoff (1987) called "the habit of questioning" (p. 15). If a handful of students managed to push the Entrance Exam out of the way for a few hours to discover the richness of reading, this was not at all a bad thing.

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Journal Writing As Communication: Responding to the Rhythm and Bass

J. David Simons

Introduction

When I was seven years old, my parents, like many other well-intentioned mothers and fathers, decided that I should learn to play the piano. My teacher was a strict disciplinarian who dryly subjected me to the learning of the notes, the endless practice of scales and the assignments of tortuous pieces of music in which I had no interest. The purpose it seems was to prepare me to pass the various musical exams which would mark my progress in the mastery of this magnificent instrument. Tied to the piano stool, I, of course, learned to read music from this teacher, but not once in the two years that I spent with her, did she communicate to me any feelings that she may have had for the music I was playing or how I was playing it. I was merely another young student who had to be drilled in the structure of the musical language. I acquired no sense of rhythm or even understanding for music, became increasingly frustrated with my progress and finally was able to successfully beg my parents for release from this weekly torture before I started to hate music altogether. I do not say that I was totally blameless in my failure, but for someone who had seemingly no natural ability to succeed as a great pianist, I genuinely felt that the lack of teacher response and the method of instruction had seriously hampered any enthusiasm I may have had for learning.

Many years later, when I was living on *kibbutz* (a small collective farm) in Israel, I had the good fortune to meet a young American called John who was quite an accomplished jazz pianist. I had boasted to him once that I could play the piano, and after that, he wouldn't stop asking me to join him for some piano jam sessions in the *kibbutz* music room. My total lack of confidence in my ability first prevented me from going, but finally he managed to persuade me.

We kept the lights off in the music room, placed some candles on top of the piano for atmosphere, and then I stolidly played some tunes from the few pieces of sheet music that were available to us.

"Come on, David. Let's play some music together," said John, sitting down beside me. "I'll play the rhythm and bass, you take the lead. Play anything you feel like, just keep the notes in key."

I was both too stunned and embarrassed to do anything.

"Go on. Just play. Follow the rhythm," he urged, while starting to lay out some rich chords.

My fingers, unused to their newly found freedom, started to reluctantly tap out some notes.

"That's fine," John said encouragingly. "Now, spread the notes out over other

octaves."

I picked out some more notes, then following the rhythm, my hands started to move more easily over the upper keyboard. John, sensing my increasing confidence, picked up the beat, and soon the music was soaring. We must have played on for about twenty minutes like this, both of us joyfully lost in the music that we were producing together. Not only was I responding to the rhythm and bass, but I was also off on my own, creating my own forms and patterns of music. I couldn't believe that I was finally able to express myself freely in this way. It was an experience that affected me deeply and a lesson I hoped that I would never forget.

Course Philosophy

Now, as a language teacher, how am I able to bring my own valuable experience in learning to express myself in music, to bear on the classes of 30 students or more that confront me each semester at Keio SFC? Japanese high school students' first baptism into learning English is not unlike my own initiation into learning to play the piano. Grammar-translation and memorization are the means of learning English, while the purpose is for passing university entrance examinations and not for communication. When I look back on my own musical experience, the main element which I feel I can extract that contributed to my personal success was that of "communication", by which I mean the encouragement and feedback which I received from my "teacher," John, and the rhythm and bass supplied by him which gave me my freedom to respond (albeit in key). Those two factors together provided the base from which I was able to move on to my own self-expression.

Transferring this to language teaching, when we speak of communication, the emphasis is usually on oral communication. But with such a large number of students, it would be impossible for me to give each one the necessary attention required within the prescribed class time in order to build up the kind of individual communication I was aiming for. Therefore, with one class of 30 intermediate-level students (referred to hereafter as "EL"), I decided to make journal writing the chosen medium through which the students would have an opportunity to genuinely communicate with their instructor. I would provide the encouragement and feedback while the "rhythm and bass", so to speak, would be supplied by the structure of the language within which the students would be able to express themselves. In this paper I will try to show how these assignments were used as a tool of effective communication between student and teacher in the hope of establishing a fertile environment for the student's self-expression. [The students' comments hereafter referred to are taken from their "Journal on Journal Writing" (J on J), which was their final assignment].

I did not directly inform my students of my purpose. As far as they were concerned, they understood only that they would have to submit a weekly jour-

nal of minimum length on various topics throughout the semester as a fulfillment of a course requirement. No mention was made of the journal being a means of communication. Inasmuch as structure, the rhythm and bass, was important, grammar and syntax errors would generally not be corrected, and students were to use the journals as a way of expressing themselves freely in written English. My own task was to try to respond to these journals with substantive comments—agreeing or disagreeing with their points of view; relating to their experiences, their fears, their hopes. In other words, I was trying to show them that their written work was not just the fulfillment of a course requirement but that they were communicating their thoughts in a meaningful way to their instructor—that the journal of an individual student was not just being assessed for the number of lines written, syntax or vocabulary, but that their own written voice was being heard even amidst all the other written voices.

Topics

Some students will find it easier to write about personal topics, others will prefer objective discourse on assigned topics. As the instructor, assigned topics on course work were important for me because they provided the students with a meaningful environment in which to use new vocabulary from class reading and discussion and they also gave me an opportunity to receive feedback about the course material. Limiting the topic also meant that I would have the information to respond meaningfully to their ideas. As Silver points out in his paper in this volume on reader response journals: “if I was to be an effective journal partner with my students, I would have to be familiar with what they had read” and therefore he chose options within a limited range of choices (See Silver, this volume). On the other hand, I did not want to inhibit students who wished to use the journals as a means of communicating on a topic in which they were particularly interested. Therefore, working on the principle of “you can’t please all of the people all of the time,” I gave students alternately free topics and assigned topics.

With the assigned topics, the subject matter was deliberately broad. At the beginning of the course, having watched and discussed the movie “Dead Poets’ Society,” the students were asked to write a journal entitled merely “Dead Poets’ Society,” thus allowing them the freedom to react to any issue which affected them from the movie. It was fascinating to see how each student responded and it certainly gave me a better idea of my students’ characteristics and interests which thereafter helped me respond more effectively to their later journals.

With the free topics, students had the opportunity to be totally creative and to express their personal interests. Some students used the free topic journal to experiment with ideas for a forthcoming research paper; some expanded on ideas from previously assigned topics; others wrote about personal issues in their own lives. These two students commented on their involvement with the topics

they wrote about:

I never think it is a complete waste of time to write journals. Because I have many topics I want to write in English. Especially when I wrote about music, I was so excited that I stayed up all night. (TO, EL "J on J").

It was easier to write on free topics than on the predecided ones because I always have something to express in some ways and I could not develop my interest naturally from my soul on provided theme. (MA, EL "J on J")

The choice of topics therefore has to be a balance between the instructor's needs, and the desires reflected in students' responses or, to continue the musical analogy—a "play it by ear" situation.

The Importance of Feedback

In order for journal writing to succeed as a means of communication for the student, it is necessary for there to be substantial feedback by the instructor. By feedback, I mean trying to respond to the student as an individual almost in the same way as one might reply to a letter. By relating to the students' thoughts, feelings and even problems, this serves two purposes. First, it personalizes the instructor in the eyes of the student, which enhances both class atmosphere and class management while, at the same time, personalizes the students in the eyes of the instructor. Second, it is essential that the students realise they are not writing in a vacuum—that their written efforts are worthy of response and comment and that journal writing is a means of communication. The students' response to the communicative value was substantial and reflects the high value they placed on it:

Just sending in the journals is half way to communication. As you get an answer, that is when you have communicated (YT, EL "J on J").

...a journal is good assignment for me. It is because writing a journal is the opportunity to express my thought in English and to communicate with you. Communication is very interesting. And communication must be like playing catch. We both must be a pitcher and a catcher (SY, EL "J on J").

Journal offers a good communication between a teacher and a student. For example, your comment for my journal was pleasure to me. According to your comment, I guess you understood what I mean well, so I know that I could communicate with you beyond

nationality. That is to say, I could understand there is a universality beyond language (MH, EL "J on J").

Personally, I reflect upon to establish some communication is the main point of writing journals....I do have a lot of things that I want to tell you and also I want to know your opinions about my writings. So I devoted my energy to my work.....Moreover, the delight, what I am looking forward to is reading through your comment. You read and digest my journals then comment upon it and I write journals then read your comments and think about it. This process is the communication, isn't it? (SS, EL "J on J").

...through writing or reading journals you and I can communicate profoundly. I'd like to talk about why I said "profoundly".....You always said that you could get to know the student's individuality, dream, ambition and etc. I also want to say that I get to know your character, your idea about various things. I also enjoy myself reading your comments toward my journal (MK, EL "J on J").

These examples, written at the end of the semester, clearly demonstrate how my feedback had helped the students. They had come to see me not just as a teacher, but (much to their surprise) as a real person.

Another technique for providing feedback which I also found particularly effective is having the students sit in small groups and read aloud from their journals their ideas and opinions about a particular assigned topic. They then ask the other students to provide feedback or comments from their own journals. In this way, the communication aspect of journal writing becomes not only student/instructor based but can move on to a student/student basis.

In addition, we have one class that we changed our opinions of our journals. It was very interesting to know what other people think and feel (YK, EL "J on J").

Reading and discussing from their journals, also gave them the opportunity to reinforce orally, language which they had only previously written.

After being used to writing journals, we should be able to use the expressions in speaking English. We won't forget the expressions that we've used ourselves (YT, EL "J on J").

Of course, it was not an easy task to manage weekly journal writing with a class of over 30 students where substantial feedback was being given. However, as the term progressed and individual rapport was being established with most of the students, I found that I too was being affected by the communication that was being created, and consequently the reading and responding became enjoyable and much easier. If the workload does become onerous, another technique that

I used from time to time was to write my own journal to the class summarizing student reaction to a particular topic, or even just expressing my feelings about how I felt the course was progressing. Here is an example of part of a journal I wrote to my students mid-way through the course:

Well, it's late at night as I sit by my computer, there is a warm breeze blowing and the mellow sounds of Keith Jarrett's jazz piano are emanating from the stereo. Since you're probably trying to write your next journal assignment at this very moment, I thought that I'd join you and write a journal to you. So, how's it going? How are you enjoying writing these journals? Yes, I know—it's Wednesday again and another journal assignment due for Mr. Simons—What a drag! You'd rather be out playing pachinko, drinking with friends, or fast asleep in a warm bed. Well, how do you think I feel? I have to read more than thirty of them!! Actually, I really enjoy reading your journals. I think journal writing is extremely important and I thought that I'd write and tell you why.

First of all, look at it this way. I have over 100 students at Keio and I not only have to get to know all of your names within 13 weeks, but I also have to give you some kind of grade at the end of term. How can I get to know all these students in such a short time? Journal writing is one way to do this. You have already told me about your families, favorite places, future dreams and free thoughts. When I look at the class now, I don't just see all these anonymous faces staring back at me, but I see Mr. Future Banker, Mr. Future Lawyer, Mr. Future Architect and Mr. Future Rock'n Roll Star. I know that student X grew up in the country, student Y loves the sea and student Z is an art lover.

Secondly, through journal writing, I begin to know your personalities. When I pick up your journals now, I see your name and think, "Oh, this will be witty" or "This one will be some kind of global perspective" or "This one will be sensitive and charming" and so on.

Thirdly, I know how difficult it is when a teacher asks you for your opinion in class, especially in a foreign language. Words start spinning around in your head, your mind goes blank, you just cannot think of anything to say and you probably think to yourself "Mr. Simons must think I'm really stupid". It's really frustrating. So journal writing can be your opportunity to organise your thoughts properly, and put your ideas down on paper without worrying too much about your grammar.

A journal such as the above helps put the students' whole journal writing experience into perspective and shows the effect their work has in communicating

with me. Furthermore, I feel there is nothing more effective for creating empathy than when the instructor is also seen as engaging in the same task as the students. Finding the time and energy to produce the necessary feedback either in personal comments or in a personal journal may require some extra effort but I definitely feel the positive effect which this has on the students and their writing is well worth the effort.

Journal Writing as an Alternative to Oral Communication

Students can be orally non-communicative in class for a variety of reasons—they may be so shy that they have trouble communicating in their native language, never mind a foreign language; they may have difficulty organizing their thoughts quickly enough, especially where the issue is complicated or where they lack the necessary technical vocabulary; they may feel inhibited at expressing a differing opinion in a cultural environment which promotes consensus; they may feel that their ideas and opinions are worthless. For all these reasons, it can be very difficult for an instructor to gain any kind of impression of that particular student or to establish any kind of rapport. When this kind of student realised that journal writing was also a form of communication, I found the response very encouraging. The following quiet students all were able to use journal writing as a surrogate voice:

As English is a second language for me, it is difficult to express thoughts in class even though I have an idea in mind. Or, I might have something that I don't want to say it in front of the class. If I didn't have a chance to write journals, those ideas would never be expressed (RK, EL "J on J").

As for me, it was too difficult to keep up with listening and talking in class, so I was unable to express successfully what I thought to my teachers. In this case, I thought to make myself understood to them, I had to make an effort to express myself by writing English (NK, EL "J on J").

I'm usually quiet in class, but I always think (about the) questions you give us. As I can't respond to your question very quickly, and I need to take some time till I begin to speak, I don't want to answer difficult questions and I'm not willing to speak voluntarily.....I know it's better to say something in class but there're.....various ways to express myself in this world (TO, EL "J on J").

I enjoyed composing a sentence as I like and expressing myself. It is difficult to speak with you in English, but the frustration which

came from not speaking with you in conversation was got rid of (KF, EL "J on J").

Another interesting point came from the more confident speakers who were eager to answer questions in class and sometimes dominated group discussions through no fault of their own. However, at the same time, many realized that their ability may have been inhibiting to the quieter students and were aware that communicative journal writing offered a way to restore the balance. Here are a couple of sensitive responses from the more confident speakers:

As we are not used to having conversations with teachers from overseas, it is amazing that even an extremely moderate student is able to have an opportunity to communicate. Therefore the teacher may feel all students in mind whereas usually there are the particular students who talk with their teacher. This can maintain the equality to the students (YT, EL "J on J").

Journal encourages the communication between teacher and student. You can communicate not only with aggressive but also with not active students (KF, EL "J on J").

For my own part, the ability of communicative journal writing to reach the quiet student was one of the most satisfying discoveries of the course. At the outset, I had intended that by providing substantive feedback to the students' work an atmosphere of communication would be created so that students would then go on to express themselves freely, in the same way as I had been able to do from my experience with music. What I had not anticipated was that journal writing for some of my students was the only medium in which they were able to communicate at all in English.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated the effectiveness of communicative journal writing in making students realize that what they write can be meaningful and worthy of detailed response from their instructor, even where the journals are not linguistically accurate. For many of the students this was their first opportunity to use English as a means of communication. As two of them commented at the end of the semester, journal writing was a refreshing change from their previous experiences with English:

As we have about thirty people in our class, each of us have only few chance to have a personal communication with you. So it was a great opportunity for us to communicate with you. In high school or other English classes, we had a chance to write our feelings or thoughts too, but what teachers did was to correct our grammatical

mistakes and only few words of their thoughts in return. It was a great pleasure to read your opinions and thoughts. I enjoyed reading it a lot. I think there are many teachers try to hide their personal feelings and just write or say noncommittal things. I think that is the one of the reasons why Japanese English education is said to be useless. Because that way, we might be able to learn grammar but we never be able to learn to express our thoughts in English as we do in Japanese (RK, EL "J on J").

Memorizing words, grammar, studying for the test, all these things are not for the language. Even if you remember these for a while, as they are not practical, you soon forget them. That's why Japanese can not "speak" English after 6 to 8 years of education. How silly it is! So I think a journal is a good place to try to express your feelings and have communications with your teachers. (YT, EL "J on J").

Moreover, the benefits of creating a conduit for communication between student and instructor are many, ranging from establishing a rapport to recognizing the quieter student. I do not want to suggest that communication through journal writing should be seen as a way out for less-confident speakers, but rather as a step towards helping them realize that they are capable of expressing ideas in the target language and that their written voice is being heard. My own experience in the *kibbutz* music room many years ago taught me the value of communication and feedback which gave me the confidence to express myself freely in the language of music. Like any creative activity, it is difficult for the student writer to work within a vacuum. With conscientious effort by the instructor to provide significant response, journal writing can become a real act of communication. When the student is provided with a fertile environment for meaningful expression, the confidence to communicate in writing can only grow. As one of my students wrote quite poetically:

In class, I did not speak much. Because I cannot speak fluently. But what I want to say I spoke. And in journals, what I want to write I wrote (HS, EL "J on J").

The Role of Teacher Response in High School Journal Writing

Mary R. Harrison

I went to a movie theater to see the Hook. And I ate potato chips. I can eat potato chip without noises in the theater. I don't bit it. I dissolve potato chips in my mouth. (Akira)

I have no money now. But I want many many things—books, comic books, games. But a paper money is just a paper. You can blow your nose with it, too. Don't you think it's like a magic? (Takeshi)

By the way, I will tell you why I am writing this Journal on this page before the page of last Journal. Because I wrote last Journal pass a page in Mistake. So I am writing this Journal on the page which I passed last week. I'm sorry. (Yoshio)

To read a 15-year-old's journal is truly to glimpse into the teen-ager's mind. In fact, in this Japanese high school, where every teacher has 165 students and a myriad of other jobs to do besides teaching, the journals have allowed me to understand more about each student than perhaps any other teacher in the school. The teaching conditions at Keio SFC High School are certainly not unique. As in any Japanese high school the classes are large (42 students each), lessons are few, and each program must adhere to time-consuming requirements set up by the Ministry of Education. The result of these conditions is that students have almost no time during class to practice or express themselves in English, and teachers have no way of determining where students need extra help or reinforcement in the language.

At SFC High School, journal writing has been a clear solution to these problems. The nature of journals is that they provide two-way communication through which problems can be addressed; through the writing of the journal itself, and through the teacher's response. It is the "teacher's response" that I will focus on in this paper. Teacher response is the aspect of journal writing over which we have control; the way we choose to respond to journals could make all the difference in students' motivation levels and performance. In my classes teacher response has been threefold: writing a comment after each entry in the students' journal notebooks, compiling and reviewing lists of common language errors in journals, and finally, giving public recognition for particularly interesting or inspiring journal entries. In this paper I will describe the ways that these three types of responses have have been instrumental for us, in terms of both skill development and student motivation.

Teacher Response Area #1: The Comment

In the fifth month of journal writing I took an anonymous survey to find out various aspects of students' journal-writing habits, such as how long it took them to write the weekly 110-word minimum, how often they used a dictionary and whether they read my comments. In this survey, 154 students out of 165 declared that they read absolutely every comment I made in their journal notebooks. (Ten of the remaining eleven said "almost every comment".) This was not a surprise, for when I return the stack of journal notebooks to the students' classroom there is often such a mad rush to dig through the pile that I've seen journals ripped in the process. Moments later, heads are buried in journal notebooks, deciphering my comments.

In contrast to this, the enthusiasm during lessons is somewhat less impressive. A quarter of the students fade in and out, some read comic books, study math or sleep. Yet these same students, who have no apparent interest in lessons become quite interested in the journal comments. This applies particularly to students who have poor listening comprehension skills in class. Herein lies the importance of the Comment; the students I can't reach during lessons I can reach through the journal.

In my journal comments I generally have one of three purposes; to respond to ideas or questions (this is by far the most common), to teach or give advice about language learning, or to discipline. The following is an example of each respectively (in all examples, names and other identifying information are changed for students' privacy):

Ken: P.S. Does Turkey the bird named for Turkey the country? I wonder why are they the same name? [This may look like a bizarre question, but we had just finished a lesson on Turkey; it was actually quite relevant.]

My response: When the first Europeans came to North America they found a bird which looked like a similar bird in Turkey called the "Guinea cock". So they began calling the American bird the "Turkey cock" and later just "Turkey". Thanks for asking.

Naomi: I wonder if there is a smarter word for "high school student"? I don't think people uses this word so often. What kind of words do they use instead? [This is a student who lived in Canada for 3 years.]

My response: How about "teen-ager"?

Yuuji: [110 words of adoration about the Swallows, a pro baseball team]

My response: Sorry but I'm rooting for the LIONS all the way! Ha ha. By the way, Yuuji, would you please stop chatting with Kenta in class?? You two are already having enough trouble in English,

and all that chatter is very annoying.

Some teachers advocate the “if-it’s-boring-I’m-not-commenting” approach to journal response (see Puetter, this volume), either as part of an implicit punishment/reward system based on “interestingness,” or as a simple time-saving device. I have completely rejected this approach, since I believe it may be the uninspired journal writer who can most benefit from suggestions or encouragement in the comments. In rare cases when there is truly nothing in the journal worth commenting upon, I write something like this:

Ichiro, can you see how difficult it is for me to comment on your journal this week? It’s because you told me only facts. Next week, try telling me your opinions or impressions about the facts, or teach me something new.

In six months of reading 165 journals a week I have resorted to this last type of comment fewer than a dozen times. Comments that encourage change usually produce the desired effect, a claim I cannot make about anything I’ve said aloud during lessons. However, change is not my first goal. The Comment is not about evaluating, criticizing or forcing students to write a certain way. It is about motivating students to express themselves, showing them that their ideas are worthy of comment, and encouraging them to write something they can take pride in. The students’ sheer excitement in getting back the comment confirms its value. Withholding comment on a “boring” journal is simply not an option I have allowed myself.

Teach Response Area #2: Error Correction

Some interlanguage theory suggests that error correction may be useless unless the learner is at a proper stage in his or her “built-in syllabus” to accept the particular correction and acquire the correct form (Corder, 1981). Many journal teachers cite this as a reason to ignore journal errors altogether; not only might error correction be a waste of teachers’ time, but it may cause students to lose sight of the free, communicative focus of journal writing.

I agree that a focus on accuracy could defeat the purpose of the journal, and that journals should not be evaluated with regard to accuracy. However, in a high school setting, students are still learning basic grammar, and journals are one of the only outlets for practice. A classroom grammar test certainly focuses on errors, but only on the structures specifically studied for that test. If more basic errors are not addressed in journals they might not be addressed at all. It has been suggested that learners’ progress toward the target language can be expedited by consciousness raising (Sharwood Smith, 1981) and error correction helps many learners become aware of the exact environment for applying grammatical rules and for discovering the precise semantic range of lexical items

(Seliger, 1979). I have made error correction a regular part of my response to students' journals, with the idea that a closer estimation of the target language could result in a more expressive journal.

In the survey I took (mentioned above), over 50% of my students admitted that they didn't pay particular attention to any red-pen corrections in their journal notebooks. Most of them said that they looked at the corrections once, but then forgot about them. In spite of this, only one student among 165 said he did not care whether he was corrected or not. Everyone else wanted to be corrected, even if they paid no attention to the corrections. It's easy to understand why; they value corrections for future reference, fully intending to look at them more carefully when they have a chance. To appease the students I correct about two mistakes per journal entry, more if there are any errors which inhibit meaning. It works well; in most cases the red markings are nothing more than decoration; the journal looks thoroughly read when it goes back to the student, and two corrections take very little time to do.

The more systematic approach I take to error treatment is to compile lists of the most common mistakes, point them out in class, give practice exercises using them and have small tests in three-week cycles. The following are a few examples of the problems areas. For the students the task here would be to choose the correct sentence of each pair and explain why it is the correct one.

- _____ I went sports shop with Ken.
- _____ I went to a sports shop with Ken.
- _____ I came back to home at 7:00.
- _____ I came back home at 7:00.
- _____ I had many homeworks.
- _____ I had a lot of homework.
- _____ We enjoyed very much.
- _____ We enjoyed it very much.

What started out as an idea for error correction has become a regular and systematic review of students' weak areas, the material for which comes directly from students' journals, and therefore from their daily experience. We review areas they naturally have use for. The result of this work has varied from student to student. In some cases, even students who score perfectly on the "common journal mistakes" exercises and tests have trouble applying the rules in their journal. This is not necessarily a negative thing; not all students naturally benefit from error correction, and since the journal is not evaluated in terms of accuracy, these students still have the freedom to express themselves without fear of making mistakes. On the other hand, some students have understood the point of the drills and have applied them in their journals. Consciousness raising appears to work for those who want it to work. Other students may

eventually take an interest in their accuracy. If I provide correction all along, the door is always left open for students who choose to take advantage of it.

Teacher Response Area #3: Public Recognition

At the beginning of the fifth month we began studying about various foreign cultures, and I told the students to reflect upon the lessons and respond in their journals. This was their first time to try a "lesson response" journal rather than a "free" journal (which was in many cases a diary), and the students complained bitterly:

It is difficult to write English lesson in journal. I finish writing but I have to write 110 words. I can finish words in complaining. (Taro)

I want to write free again. I can't think a topic in class.(Yuko)

Instead of reflecting on the lessons, many students were simply giving a summary of the information. Some seemed to have no idea what "reflection" meant. On the other hand, some students understood well and did a fine job expressing themselves. I felt that these students could show the others how to write these journals at least as well as I could. So I chose sixteen two- to three-line excerpts from appropriately "reflective" journals, typed them up, wrote the student's family name in Japanese after each excerpt, and casually hung it on the wall of the classroom without discussion. The topic was "Brazil". Here were some examples:

The iguanas.. I can not imagine how it tastes...if the people in Brazil can eat it, I can too. (Suzuki)

Brazil is very interesting country. The people is very free, and easy. In Japan, we usually do something on time...I think our society is made by time...I learned what cultural difference was. (Tanaka)

Portugal people came and killed a lot Indians and break their culture. I don't like this century. (Watanabe)

They have no feeling about time...But we musn't make fun of them. If I am Brazilian I will do the same things as them. (Takahashi)

Brazil has an infration which is messing up the economy. But people play soccer, go to carnivals and enjoy themselves. That's much better than in Japan life...Our fathers don't even have vacations a week long. (Yamada)

The response to this was overwhelming. The mood of the lesson-response journals changed overnight. This had been their first time to see what other students were writing, and the public recognition had a clear element of competition to it. The first week after hanging these journals on the classroom wall, I did not even need to collect the journals in class. They were already on the front desk in a neat pile when I came into the classroom. A few weeks later in weariness I called a "journal holiday", and half a dozen students protested, saying it was, after all, a journal, and how could I call a mandatory break from it.

The issue of competition for motivation is a difficult one, as competition is a recurring theme even in the teen-agers' free-writing journals. They are painfully aware that every classmate is either more or less popular, good-looking, sporty, talented or chic than every other classmate, and some of them find it quite depressing. If I decided to hang the "best" journal excerpts on the wall every week, someone would surely be left out and become frustrated, and the whole point of journal writing would be lost for that person. I am convinced the journal must always remain a supportive, non-critical place to express oneself. Once in a while I can exploit the competitive nature of high school to motivate the students or stir up their creative forces, but if I don't seek moderation, the method could defeat itself.

Managing the Time

How, you might ask, does one busy teacher have time to read, correct and comment on 165 journals a week? There is no question that it is a time commitment; the journals for one class of 42 students takes me between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. Many teachers have found it helpful to assign journals twice a month instead of every week. Others, as an occasional substitute for individual comments, write a "teacher's journal" back to the entire class, especially if there is a recurring theme among the journals that week (see Simons, this volume).

Practically speaking, it has helped me to concentrate deliberately on speed when reading journals. Each journal can take less than two minutes if I take care to skim for content instead of reading every word. In any case, most journal teachers would probably agree that it's far better to invent time-saving devices than to give up on an activity of such value.

Conclusion

When I first began the journal writing activity with my high school freshmen I did not know myself what a great impact it would have on our learning experience together. The students are clearly more motivated to write journals than to do most other assignments, and I am convinced that this motivation is

closely related to the types of responses I've chosen to give.

Most of the students at our school are academically inclined, and would write the journal for a good grade whether I responded to them or not. However, it is not their grade that sends them eagerly digging through the pile of returned journals. It is not their grade that moves them to watch their errors in the journals; indeed, since I don't evaluate the accuracy of their journals, it would be quite useless. And it is not their grade that stirs them to produce something interesting; they receive the same amount of credit for a journal that is dead boring.

No, the evidence of motivation seems to come from their anticipation of my response. They dig through the pile because they want to read my impressions of what they wrote. They watch their errors, even if they have no inner drive to write accurately, because they know I'm reading, and may be disappointed if I see the same mistakes again and again. And finally, if their journal is particularly interesting, and if they are lucky, they might even get recognized in front of their class.

Without the teacher's response, the journal would lose its meaning as a learning tool in my classroom. In this high school setting, I've needed to consider my responses very carefully, always bearing in mind a teen-ager's need for acceptance and encouragement in an otherwise competitive environment. The responses might not only enhance my students' classroom experience, but also provide the motivation they need to keep learning long after they have left my class.

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Journal Writing for Japanese Students: What Do They Write and What Do They Learn?

Yoshiko Takahashi

Introduction

There are many reasons why journal writing is an effective tool for teaching English to Japanese students. A study I conducted last year (in press) suggests that Japanese students respond more favorably than American students to personal attention from their teacher. I interviewed 40 Japanese and American college students in the spring and summer of 1992 and found that, for Japanese students, being personally identified by professors played a crucial role in deciding whether they visited professors for information regarding class assignments. The majority of Japanese students stated, in fact, that unless they were certain that their professors would recognize their faces, they would not visit them for academic advice or discussion. In other words, establishing a personal relationship enhances Japanese students' learning opportunities. Journal writing helps establish this relationship.

A complaint often expressed by those who teach English to Japanese students is the scarcity of conversation topics. It is often observed that even students with an advanced knowledge of English grammar and semantics cannot initiate or lead conversations because they cannot come up with topics to talk about that interest them. The journal assignment demonstrates to these students that the world around them is rich in subject material for discussion and teaches them to become keen observers of the world in which they live.

Before entering the university, students' primary use of English is in their preparation for the entrance examination (see McCornick, this volume). Writing assignments seldom require more than one paragraph, and students focus on structure not on content. Furthermore, the content of their writing is usually remote and unrelated to their own interests. For the majority of students, English is a school subject, nothing more. In contrast to this, journal writing makes students aware that they can use English to convey what they think to others and receive a response. When students realize that they can use English as an effective communicative tool, they have more fun, they are less inhibited, and one can expect their motivation to rise.

Finally, journals written by students provide teachers with a good source of information about student interest, as this paper intends to show. Journal writing helps students understand that English is a means of communication.

Many positive effects of journal writing assignment for Japanese students

having been cited, this paper now investigates how Japanese students actually respond to the journal writing assignment. I will discuss how Japanese students reacted to this relatively new English teaching technique (in Japan, at least) and what they presumably learned from the experience. Specifically my discussion will be focused on the following three points: (1) whether there is any relationship between what students write (topic) and how they write (rhetorical type); (2) whether there is a change in topic and rhetorical type over time; and (3) whether there is a change in terms of quantity of output. Further, I will try to shed some light on an additional issue, one that does not lend itself to easy answers, that is motivation for learning English and quantity and quality of journal writing.

The students in this study were college freshmen in their first semester of the Intensive English Program at Keio SFC. Their beginning TOEFL scores (450-460) place them in the lower-intermediate level in relation to other students. Among the 27 students, one student spent one year in Hawaii as an exchange student, two students spent two to three weeks in England attending an English conversational school, and one student spent one summer in the U.S.A. The others had not been abroad. Students wrote one journal a week. A semester of fifteen weeks thus provides fifteen opportunities for a journal to be submitted, but I required only twelve submissions. Journals were always collected on Thursday, my last day of instruction for the week, and returned, with my feedback, the following Wednesday. My comments included some grammatical and semantic correction, but otherwise were restricted to content.

Since the objective in assigning students the journal writing is to help make them good thinkers and at the same time to make them aware that English can be used to express their own ideas, I placed no restriction on topic. My only requirements were that they give me a minimum length, that the papers be typed, with a standard font size, double-spaced, etc. As a result, there was a great variation in the choice of student topic.

Japanese Students' Response to the Journal Writing Assignment

The typical student reaction when first confronted by the journal writing assignment is to ask, "What is a journal?" "I don't know how to write a journal." "What should I write about?" I have a response to these questions—the words from an essay, *Tsurezuregusa*, by the hermit poet Yoshida Kenko:¹ "Kokoro ni utsuriyuku yoshinashigoto o kakitsukureba..." (Follow the natural flow of your thinking and write whatever comes to mind...). This phrase is familiar to Japanese students through their formal school education. Most students are forced to learn this excerpt by heart in junior or senior high school, and under-

¹Kamakura period, 14th century.

stand instantly what they are expected to write. In my current English class, for example, composed of lower-intermediate students, only one student out of thirty-two was unable to understand the significance of the Tsurezuregusa passage. After students understood what was expected, they tended to submit their journals regularly. My class consisted of 32 students, and on average I received 27 or 28 journals every week.

Topics and Rhetorical Types

The following report and discussion are based on the preliminary analyses of 152 journal submissions by 27 students in the first seven weeks of the fall 1992 semester. The 27 students were selected because they submitted journals regularly. Table 1 lists the topics and rhetorical types of student journals from most to least frequent. Table 2 shows the relationship between rhetorical type of journal writing and topic. The rhetorical types for students' journals are classified into the following four types for convenience:

- (1) Description: Description of events and people.
- (2) Opinion: Expression of opinions on various issues. The difference of this type of student's writing and Western type of expository writing is that in my students' writing, only one side (students') of an opinion was expressed and no argument was provided.
- (3) Reflection: Reflection on their values, ideas, ways of thinking in general.
- (4) Miscellaneous: The rhetorical types which could not be classified in any type of the above, which include poems, expressing one's wishes for the future, and counseling (asking for my advice).

For classification of students' writing I had tried to utilize Western models of writing types such as narration, description, and exposition; however, none of my students' writing fit the Western categories precisely enough. This is natural when we consider the fact that none of my students had received any formal instruction in writing either in English or in Japanese. The majority of Japanese students do not receive any formal writing instruction at school. The only exceptions are elementary school children and college-bound high-school students who go to cram schools to prepare for entrance examinations. At elementary schools children are asked to write their impressions on school-related events such as excursion or athletic festival a couple of times a year. At junior and senior high schools, students are sometimes asked to write on novels or essays which they read in Japanese language classes. However, even in these cases, teachers do not specifically teach how to write criticism. Instead, teachers ask students to write how they feel about the story. At cram schools, some essay writing instruction has been given recently since some universities

have added an essay writing section on their entrance examinations. However, writing is still rarely taught even at universities.

The most popular topic for student journals (see Table 1) were hobbies and sports (19 students), followed by politics (13) and university work and study (11 students). The topics appearing in descriptive writing in order of frequency (see Table 2), are (1) hobbies and sports; (2) class/university work/study; and (3) memories of high school days. The topics students used to express their opinions were (1) politics; (2) the internationalization of Japan; and (3) the negative influence of the mass media (concerns about the manipulation of opinion and behavior). The topics that made students produce more reflective writing were (1) the meaning of life; (2) death in the family; and (3) marriage/love/sex.

Table 1

Topics of Students' Journals in the Order of Frequency

| Rank | Topics of Students' Journals | Number of Journals |
|------|---|--------------------|
| 1. | hobbies/sports | 19 |
| 2. | politics (domestic/international) | 13 |
| 3. | class/university work/study | 11 |
| 4. | learning English | 8 |
| 4. | memories of high school days | 8 |
| 6. | movies | 7 |
| 6. | travel/vacation | 7 |
| 8. | internationalization | 6 |
| 8. | overseas experience | 6 |
| 10. | friends (boyfriends), friends, friendship | 5 |
| 10. | self introduction | 5 |
| 10. | future dreams/hope | 5 |
| 13. | meaning of life | 4 |
| 13. | violence of mass media | 4 |
| 15. | pet | 3 |
| 15. | manner/life in general | 3 |
| 15. | computer | 3 |
| 15. | nature | 3 |
| 15. | part-time job | 3 |
| 15. | family | 3 |
| 15. | intercultural differences | 3 |
| 22. | marriage/love/sex | 2 |
| 22. | literature | 2 |
| 22. | drinking | 2 |
| 25. | Others* | 17 |
| | Total: | 152 |

*discrimination, diet, drinking, mysteries of space, brain death/organ transplant, dying in a hospital, where I live, capital punishment, etc.

| Table 2 | | |
|--|------|--|
| <i>Rhetorical Types and Topics of Students' Journals</i> | | |
| Rhetorical Type | Rank | Topics |
| Description | 1. | hobbies and sports |
| | 2. | class/university work/study |
| | 3. | memories of high school days |
| | 4. | travel/vacation |
| Opinion | 1. | politics |
| | 2. | internationalization of Japan |
| | 3. | negative influence of mass media |
| | 4. | preserving nature |
| Reflection | 1. | meaning of life |
| | 2. | on death of family or closely related people |
| | 3. | marriage/love/sex |
| | 4. | intercultural differences |

Change of Topic or Rhetorical Type Over Time

This section investigates whether there were changes in writing over the seven-week period. In the first journals, there were several commonalities; nine of the twenty-seven students talked about summer vacations; four introduced themselves, two expressed concern about the journal writing assignment, and two expressed a strong resolve to master English. However, from the second week on, no pattern can be observed in terms of rhetorical type or topic. My expectation was that students' writing would start with description and gradually move to more and more reflection. No such change was observed over the seven week period. Two students wrote only descriptive papers throughout the entire seven-week period. The rest of the class, however, showed great variation. Table 3 shows students' topics and rhetorical types for the period. Most (25 out of 27) gave titles to their journals without instruction to do so.

Change in Quantity of Output

The final question in this study was whether the length of student journals would increase over time. The minimum required length was one page (approximately 250 words) and most of the students met this requirement each week. Sometimes students wrote one and a half pages and some students went up to two journal pages. However, no steady pattern of increase in length was observed for journals over the seven-week period. Length varied according to topic. Judging this impressionistically, it seemed to me that students wrote more when they were interested in their topics. These journals were interesting to read, too (see Puetter, this volume). When they wrote just to fulfill the assignment, they

inevitably wrote the minimum length, often complaining about having nothing to say. Titles were lacking in these instances, and the papers could be described as short, empty of serious content and uninspired.

Table 3

Individual Students' Change of Topic and Rhetorical Type Over Time

| Student | Week | Topics | Rhetorical Types |
|---------|------|---|------------------|
| A(f) | 1 | Summer holidays | description |
| | 2 | Diet (influence of mass media) | opinion |
| | 3 | Capital offense | opinion |
| | 4 | To avoid negative influence of mass media (AIDS) | opinion |
| | 5 | How to develop our own judgement | reflection |
| | 6 | Can you accept a blond hair sumo wrestler? | reflection |
| | 7 | University is a preparatory school for our future | reflection |
| B(m) | 1 | Self-Introduction | description |
| | 2 | What is love? | reflection |
| | 3 | My father | reflection |
| | 4 | No title (on American pro-sports) | opinion |
| | 5 | Relationship between Asian countries and Japan | opinion |
| C(m) | 6 | Friendship | reflection |
| | 1 | Are Japanese people happy? | opinion |
| | 2 | Sad winning | opinion |
| | 3 | Why did Perot return? | opinion |
| | 4 | Future of Russia | opinion |
| | 5 | John F. Kennedy | opinion |
| D(m) | 6 | The ironies of Columbus' discoveries | opinion |
| | 1 | My circle | description |
| | 2 | My summer journey | description |
| | 3 | The memories of Fujisawa festival | description |
| | 4 | A rainy Monday (on his grandmother's death) | reflection |
| | 5 | Learning English | miscellaneous |
| E(f) | 6 | Thinking of American president election | opinion |
| | 1 | Love ya cuty (on her pet dog) | miscellaneous |
| | 2 | What should we do? (on relationship) | miscellaneous |
| | 3 | Getting fat | description |
| | 4 | Smokers | opinion |
| | 5 | Catalonia | opinion |
| | 6 | Catalonia | opinion |
| | 7 | Best way to learn English | opinion |

1. (f) stands for 'female' and (m) for 'male'.
2. The words in parentheses in the topic column were supplied by me to clarify the content of students' journals.

Motivation

As expected, no clear relationship can be found between motivation for learning English and choice of topic. I originally expected I might be able to show that students participating more fully in class would also be writing journals of greater variety and interest, but in the seven-week period, I found no clear evidence of this. One thing for certain, however, is that the students' attitudes in classroom activities reflected the quantity of output and the submission rate of journals. The students who came to class on time and participated actively in class submitted journals regularly and wrote more in each journal than less active students in class.

Discussion

At the beginning of this paper, three objectives were alluded to in the journal writing assignment: (1) to provide an opportunity for individualized instruction by establishing close relationship between student and teacher by communicating through frequent journal writing; (2) to generate in students an awareness of the world around them and a desire to interact with it; and (3) to make students recognize that English can be used to communicate their personal ideas and feelings.

As for the first objective, journal writing in this freshman English class clearly met the goal of individualizing instruction. Students often raised questions in their journals which I was able to respond to. When they asked for my opinion, I gave it to them, and they often then responded to my responses, thus creating an on-going dialogue. Eventually, a nice rapport developed between us as they helped me understand their interests and needs in learning English. I was able to use that information to modify and fine-tune my lessons to accommodate this feedback. Journals also provided a rich source of classroom discussion topics.

As for the second objective, no pronounced change in student behavior was observed in class in the seven-week period. However, a majority of the students stated that in order to write journals, they had started to pay much more attention to social, political, and economic news and issues than they had before.

As for developing student awareness of English as a means of communication, it is evident that attitudes toward English changed in the seven weeks. Student journals indicated that they tried to express much more than their grammatical and semantic competence allowed. In other words, students seemed to be trying to convey what they wanted to say in spite of their linguistic limitations. Their limited linguistic ability did not seem to inhibit an outpouring of ideas in English. In the end, my students were impressed with the fact they had each produced seven to twelve pages of written English on their own, a very clear piece of evidence before their eyes of language competence: "I didn't think

I could write this much in English!" "Journal writing forced me to think and was a good mental exercise to conceptualize things." "I found many interesting things around me because I had to find a journal topic every week."² Of course, there were students who did not appreciate journal writing. These students, although a minority in number (4 or 5 out of 32), clearly stated in their journals that they hated journal writing because it took too much time. Nonetheless, students' reaction to the journal writing assignment in general was very positive.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that journal writing goes a long way toward improving the quality of English language instruction in Japan. However, the question remains whether this teaching technique leads to transfer of skills to other areas of learning (see Casanave, this volume, for students' opinion on this matter). Can the articulateness developed in writing be transferred to verbal skills, for example? Although studies have shown that there is little relationship between development of writing ability in a non-native language (NNL) and the development of other NNL language skills (cf. Shacter and Harklau, 1992), my impression through comparing student journals and their overall language skills is that there is a positive relationship between them. It may be assumed that those grammatical points and vocabulary items that students use in journal writing may stay longer and be transferred to other linguistic areas because they are used to express their own interests and ideas. In other words, once a data base is established to express their own ideas, opinions and feelings in their brain, it can be tapped as easily in speaking as in writing.

In reality, however, there is a considerable gap between what students write and what they say in class in terms of fluency, sophistication of vocabulary and ideas. Given the fact that students were able to write fairly sophisticated journals when they were given enough time, we may assume that this process can be shortened with practice. Limiting or reducing student writing time gradually, for example, may force students to shorten their thinking time and transfer it to the oral communication process.

Content analysis of student journals in this study suggests that the more interesting the topic is to students, the more fluent and thorough the coverage of the topic becomes. In other words, interesting topics seem to activate and inspire students' thinking and learning as well as their linguistic skills. What students write may, in fact, help determine what they learn. How teachers can help students find interesting topics that will activate their minds and learning processes is, therefore, a pedagogical issue worth investigating.

²Students comments are taken from the written reactions to general comments on journal writing collected last semester from beginning-level students.

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Journal Writing: A Teacher's Reflections

Rebecca A. Pickett

The semester has just begun, and again I have assigned my first year intensive English students the task of writing twelve journal entries in the next four months. Why did I choose this activity as part of their first English course in the university? I sometimes think the students ask the same question when they are struggling with the weekly writing. It is a heavy assignment that seriously eats into their limited time. The day for handing in the journals arrives with annoying frequency for the students—and sometimes for me. Yet we live with it: the students because they have little choice, and I because I believe that journal writing is the single activity that most consistently develops students as users of English and as thinkers. And the students who faithfully and conscientiously fulfill the assignment throughout the semester demonstrate growth both as thinkers and as users of English.

The Assignment

Perhaps I should make clear at the beginning what I have to make clear to my students at the beginning of each semester—and sometimes explain more than once—the difference between a journal and a diary. Sometimes students are inclined to write diary entries in which they detail what they do on their weekends or what they have read in the paper or seen on television. This is not at all what I see as the assignment. Therefore, I tell them that I am expecting them to come to grips with their world, not just describe or detail it. I want writing that involves thinking. I want to find their thoughts and feelings in relation to their world, the things they read in the paper or see on television, and not just a single sentence about their position. I want them to explore their own minds and attitudes and express the ideas they find. It is through this type of mental activity that a student comes to know his own mind, to know himself, and self-awareness is the beginning of an education (Fulwiler, 1987, p. 31). The journal assignment moves students in this direction.

The Students

The students who enter my classes are, for the most part, particularly lacking in self-awareness. The only identities they know are the identities of the group, the family, and the school. They are aware of their social environment, but have little awareness of themselves as autonomous, thinking individuals within

that society. They are the products of Japanese education, which is popularly known for its emphasis on preparing students to succeed in the university entrance examinations (see McCornick, this volume). This success provides them a foothold on the ladder to economic success. Again, this is a social goal.

While the secondary schools succeed admirably in this mission, they often in the process teach the students to be dependent rather than independent learners. Their self-confidence and sense of their own abilities and responsibilities as students are almost non-existent. When asked a question, they must consult their nearby classmates before answering. Of course, I understand that this response is also a culturally based one, and the individual must not seem to stand apart from the group. Yet, it is a response that sends the message to students that they cannot think or act independently, thus shackling them in becoming free individuals, independent learners, and thinking adults.

Training vs. Education

The phrase 'dependent learners' means that students have been conditioned to expect that knowledge will be passed down from their teachers to them, not that they must reach for it, search any and every way for it, and, in effect, create their own education. Although there are often criticisms of the Japanese school system, its teaching methods, and what students are allowed to think about and explore, this criticism cannot be limited to Japanese schools. In many schools in the U. S. the same thing is going on. With state wide exit testing of high school students, many teachers have resorted to teaching the minute and specific items of the tests, rather than teaching students in broad areas of exploration and thinking, and then trusting them to draw correct test responses from this broader knowledge. As in Japanese schools, many U. S. schools emphasize the social obligations of the students. Fulwiler (1987) says, "[w]hile it may be true that schools exist essentially to teach thinking, it is also true that many schools teach conformity and good manners and help justify the reigning political, social and economic system" (p. 8). It is simply easier to control people (including students) if those in authority can control the way their people think.

Fulwiler(1987) asserts that a truly liberating education is seen by some as dangerous. He refers to Paulo Freire's (1970) idea that

'liberating education' only occurs when people develop their critical reasoning skills , including self-knowledge and self-awareness...to think critically separates the autonomous, independent people, who are capable of making free choices from the passive receivers of information. In Freire's terms, liberating education consists of 'acts of cognition,' not transferrals in information (p. 8).

Training for control has no place in the university. Universities should not be involved with limiting and controlling people. Rather, a university education

should be one of liberation and growth. The university has been created not only as a place where people teach and learn, but also as a place where they engage in research and explore beyond the boundaries of what is already known or accepted. Professors in the universities are required to perform research and publish their findings. And in such activities, they demonstrate to the students the freedom and spirit of inquiry into which their presence at the university is an initiation.

With each new freshman class I teach, I become more conscious of the meaning of education as I see students responding to the challenge of the university program and to their release from strictly imposed structures and limitations. When I tell my students that in their journals they can write about what interests them, what they want to write about, whatever they feel comfortable about sharing with me—that the choice is theirs—they sometimes seem to have more difficulty deciding what to write about than they do writing it. However, I think this kind of open assignment results in students' developing more serious, authentic writing (see Casanave, this volume). Kirby and Liner (1981), writing in *Inside Out*, put it this way:

Because students use the journal to write about those things they are interested in, they often write with clearer, more powerful language...student writing usually comes off better if the motivation for writing and the topic ideas well up from within the students themselves. The journal is an idea market, a place where students explore ideas that interest them alone (p. 46).

Zinsser (1988) agrees, stating that "motivation is crucial " to writing well (p. 14).

While my journal writing assignment allows students to exercise choice in the areas of subject matter, one matter that is not left to the students' choice is the length. I ask them to write from one and a half to two pages, on A-4 paper, typewritten, double spaced. This is a heavy assignment, and I am not unaware of the burden the week's writing imposes on the students (See Harrison, this volume). I try to plan their writing in such a way that it is spread rather evenly over the semester. In this way, my intensive English class makes no heavy writing demands at the end of the semester when other classes require long reports that often keep students at school overnight to complete. I also try to ease the students' burden by keeping the number to twelve journals, allowing them to choose two weeks during the semester when they will not have to write and submit a journal. I always urge students to save these free weeks and spend them when they are under particular pressures from other classes (see Casanave, this volume).

My Response

I must say that the burden of journals does not all fall on the students (see Harrison, this volume). I also find it difficult to read all of my students' journals week after week. I don't always look forward to sitting down to a big stack of journals (besides the directed writing on class content) every week, but once I get into the journals, I really enjoy communicating with the students and getting to know them through their writing. The persona they create on the page is a persona that is not always apparent in the classroom. Sometimes people who are too shy or too self-conscious to express themselves in class will express themselves more freely through the journal (see Simons, this volume).

I read all journal submissions and give comments on the content. I do not give students a grade or correct their mistakes. This approach gives the students freedom to write without worrying about textual perfection. At first students seem not to comprehend or believe this statement about not grading their journal writing, but after two or three weeks, they relax into their subjects, forgetting about their shyness and hesitation, their fear of a misspelled word or a misplaced punctuation mark. While the finished product is often less than polished, publishable prose, the papers are readable, and the ideas are expressed with at least enough of the conventions to communicate between writer and reader. In effect, the no-grading rule seems to reduce the affective filter and allow students to develop fluency in their writing. The editing of a paper—i.e., putting it into the approved rhetorical form—is another lesson, involving a different set of perceptions and skills.

Journal writing has its rewards in the communication between writer and reader (see Simons, this volume). When instead of a grade or a correction of a student's mistakes, I comment on his ideas and respond with some ideas of my own, a dialogue comes into existence. Sometimes this represents the only real dialogue the young person has with a person who is not his immediate peer. Although I usually keep my comments brief, at times I get so involved in the subject that I write almost as much as the student. I have seen students' amazed and pleased faces when this happens.

Changes that Students Experience

I think many students begin the journal writing for the semester by writing in Japanese and then translating their papers into English. However, this method is very laborious and time-consuming, and gradually students are weaned away from it because they simply have not the time to go through this double process. Therefore, they begin to truly compose in English, and before the end of the semester, they have written so many sentences that they are able to write in English without translating. Gradually the forms and patterns of conventional writing in English replace the awkward erratic production of the early part of

the year.

The structures that students create and internalize through the writing process, together with those which they learned in secondary English, seem to be sufficient for using English, requiring no further specific grammar study. Students entering the university already have a good basis from which to develop their speaking ability, although their high school study has been mostly through reading. As a result of this situation, they have, unfortunately, developed a very high affective filter that prevents any comfort in trying to speak. Therefore, I try to give them as much of the class time as possible in oral discussion, presentations of materials by the students, and other forms of oral language and listening. Journal writing becomes an out-of-class activity.

Although I emphasize oral language in the classroom, I believe that reading and writing are essential to continued language development. Reading provides students with a variety of vocabulary and sentence structures which are essential to further development in those areas. At the same time, this activity provides the base out of which students draw words and structures for expressing their own ideas and perceptions. I like to think of these activities as "programming the computer" and providing a file from which to draw essential information for both listening and speaking. It is accepted that reading plays an important roll in learning to write well in the first language, perhaps even more than writing instruction itself. My own work with foreign language students convinces me that it is, perhaps, even more important for them. Certainly, reading is the form most frequently experienced by many (perhaps most) students.

Communicative Dynamic

Both Zinsser (1988) and Fulwiler (1987) make statements about the change in dynamics between teacher and students brought about by the use of journal writing, statements that have proven true in my own experience. Zinsser says that "[t]hrough the writing of our students we are reminded of their individuality" (p. 48). He also talks about producing broadly educated individuals with "a sense of stewardship for the world they live in." Fulwiler says simply "...reading student journals humanizes the teacher" (p. 28). Through the journals my own students have emerged as real people, individuals with wishes, desires, frustrations, courage. They are no longer thirty to thirty-five young bodies stuffed into a room that is entirely too small for comfort. I have come to know them as young people facing all the problems of becoming adults. Many of them look forward to futures that do not promise a great deal in the way of personal freedom or wide choices. And although they suffer periods of uncertainty and confusion, they exhibit amazing patience and a kind of acceptance of the limits of their lives.

As students begin to understand themselves, they make a personal type of identification through the writing of their journals. By realizing that they

really do have something to say about their lives and their world, and that what they have to say is worth communicating, they develop self-confidence. These new attitudes, in turn, influence the things they choose to write about, and the kinds of observations and comments they make about their subjects demonstrate growth in maturity as well as growth in their ability to use English. The real fruit of the journal writing appears after time and patience: fluency is developed first, and then proficiency follows. Without overt instruction or correction, with experience and maturity, proficiency seems to develop naturally.

Intellectual and Personal Growth

Let's consider briefly what the journal writing assignment requires of students: thus, we can have a better idea of the development it produces. It requires first that they explore their own minds and feelings for topics of significance and interest. This type of personal investigation over a period of time allows students to understand themselves and their thoughts and feelings.

Self-knowledge

Journal writing makes students more self-aware, and it is only through becoming self-aware that they understand why they choose to study what they study, and to perceive in some way in what direction they are moving in their thoughts (Fulwiler 1988, p. 31). And through the continued practice of self-awareness is developed what I want to call "self-knowledge," and the growth of that self through both analytical and creative thinking. The self-knowledge and the growth and flowering of the self that follow are what real education is all about. True education is a growth of the individual into the stature of competence and confidence as a person and an individual. And the journal writing assignment forces the individuals to reach into their minds and hearts and communicate with themselves, to meet and to accept the ideas within, and to be nurtured and strengthened by them.

Critical Thinking

It may sound rather metaphysical and distant to the world of reality to say that the journal writer develops the inner person, but the internal changes have a very practical and observable result. These changes are revealed in a student's writing and critical thinking. Critical thinking is present in the way the writer organizes and presents his thinking to the reader. With the use of a foreign language, this means that the writer develops an understanding not only of words and phrases, but also of the cultural reference for communication, as language requires more than words and sentences for full encoding and decoding

of communications. The journal writer needs to know something of the rhetorical patterns and verbal arrangements characteristic of English to communicate effectively. Journal writing gives students experience in analyzing their readers and their material, and then choosing the most effective patterns for presenting this material in their writing. And through the use of these patterns of writing, students are developing an understanding of the traditional patterns for thinking in English and in Western societies. Through repeated use, these patterns become familiar and habitual, permitting more ease in verbal reception and more success in communicating in English. And, as is true of all bilingual development, these new patterns of thinking will give the students even more paths for thinking—more ways of approaching whatever ideas and problems they encounter in their professions or their lives.

Taking a Position

Yet another feature of journal writing is that the students find and present their own personal positions on the topics they choose to discuss. Many students—Japanese students included, because of their youth and lack of experience (or because they have been put down or restricted by their elders and teachers)—are fearful of expressing their personal opinions. In fact, with Japanese students opinions seem so deeply buried that I sometimes wonder if students are afraid to have opinions. Yet the journal writing is a fairly unthreatening way for them to develop and state their opinions—to learn to have opinions and to understand and present the basis for those opinions. It is also an opportunity for them to re-examine those opinions when they are unable to support them. The process of examining and re-examining opinions and learning to provide a basis for those opinions takes time, and during the process, students need and deserve support and understanding. This whole process is possible only in non-threatening situations.

The problem of developing, presenting and supporting a point of view is one of the most difficult intellectual steps which a beginning university student faces. Typically, freshmen have feelings or urgings toward a particular position but lack the skill to analyze their feelings and to put them into words. This problem seems particularly difficult for Japanese students. This situation may come from the social atmosphere, one in which decisions are commonly made by a group, and one in which group harmony may be considered of more importance than any individual's feelings or opinions. The problem may also be exacerbated by the nonspecific, somewhat ambiguous nature of the Japanese language, a quality particularly admired in the culture. Or again, the problem may be influenced by the large cultural differences between Japanese society and that of the Western world. Writing in English is expected to be unambiguous and to represent sincerely the position and point of view of the writer. Journal writing allows the writer to use specific language and to take a strong personal position. Yet it allows the student to do it at some distance from the scene,

so to speak, since it is a written expression rather than an oral one, a distance that encourages the young and the shy.

Familiarity with Discourse Patterns

Developing a thorough familiarity with discourse patterns and effective rhetorical tools in the English language has been seen by American universities as essential to learning the subject matter taught at the university. And this view has led to the development of the many "Writing Across the Curriculum" programs so popular today. The rhetorical patterns for thinking in the West are the same as those for writing. Therefore, Zinsser (1988) can say, "[w]riting is thinking on paper" (p. 11).

Writing and thinking—and critical thinking—seem to be inextricably bound together. Therefore, when I ask my students to write a journal entry every week, I am asking them to sit down, choose a subject, think about that subject, examine it critically, take a position or a point of view in relation to it, and write for me in English their perceptions, ideas, and feelings. There is no way that this can be a "report"; it cannot be a rehash of what they have read or heard on television, or what their friends say, although any or all of these things may have contributed to their thinking. The expression must come from the writers and must be their thinking, their ideas, and their reasons.

As I write these words, I begin to understand anew why I continue to ask my freshman students to write journals. A journal writing assignment is an assignment for growth in self-knowledge, a growth in analysis and critical thinking, and a growth in the use of the English language. It also produces a growth in understanding of the possibilities for the writers in these areas and in their lives as whole.

Now, the hour is late, and I need to finish responding to my students' journals so that I can give them back tomorrow, when sixty-five new journals representing this week's deliberations will wing their way to my desk!

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Student Voices: The Insiders Speak Out on Journal Writing *

Christine Pearson Casanave

"Journal writing tells teachers more about what students know and don't know than more formal assignments designed specifically to find these things out. In fact, the personal, expressive language of journals reveals not only student knowledge, but how students construct that knowledge, and how they feel about what they've constructed. For teachers interested in both the product and process of learning, journals are the most comprehensive writing assignments available." (Fulwiler, 1989, p. 149)

Introduction

Within the small body of work on first and second language journal writing (e.g., Fulwiler, 1987; Peyton, 1990; Peyton & Seyoum, 1989; Reyes, 1991; Staton, Shuy, Peyton, & Reed, 1988), students' language, lives, thoughts as revealed in their journal writing are examined in great detail. Most analyses consist of teacher and researcher perspectives on various changes in students' language and thinking as revealed in the grammar, language functions, topics, elaborations, and so forth, in students' regular journal entries. Dialogue journals, in particular, have been closely scrutinized in these ways (Peyton, 1990; 1992; Staton, et al., 1988). Teachers and researchers who have used and analyzed students' journals heap praise on journal writing, as the introductory quotation indicates. Nevertheless, with the exception of occasional quotations praising the activity, the students' own opinions on what the experience of journal writing has been like for them have rarely been described in any systematic way. Only Lucas (1990, 1992) through interviews and questionnaires with students, focuses intensely on the variety of student responses— not all of them positive—to a journal writing assignment.

Students' voices deserve more attention. It is they who are the first-hand witnesses to their own linguistic and educational development. Therefore, in this paper I explore in some detail the experience of journal writing from students' perspectives, as they have expressed it in writing and in interviews. They talk about their language development, the process of journal writing, their topics, and educational issues such as thinking abilities, learning, changes of perspec-

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tive, and personal growth.¹ Their voices constitute the heart of this paper. Both negative and positive student views are included, although only a small proportion of students in all groups expressed serious negative views (see Casanave, 1992, for descriptive statistics on this matter). In the conclusion of the paper, I shift back to the teacher's perspective to see what we can learn from these voices.

The Students and the Sources of Their Opinions

Four classes of students at three different levels of proficiency, with approximately 30 students per class, comprise the writers for this particular investigation of student perspectives on journal writing:

| | GROUP 1 | GROUP 2 | GROUP 3 |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| Beginning TOEFL | 440+ | 485+ | 550+ (returnee) |
| # of Classes/Students | 2/60 | 1/30 | 1/30 |
| Class "Name" | EG, EH | EL | ES |

The Group 1 and Group 3 students were my own and the Group 2 students wrote journals for another teacher. With some exceptions among the returnee group, most students were products of "entrance exam" English classes (see McCornick, this volume) and had never written more than a few consecutive sentences in English in which they expressed their own thoughts. Many had not written their own ideas in Japanese either. Most of their previous writing practice revolved around preparation for entrance exam essays, in which they adhered to rules, formulae, and predetermined content. Likewise, the majority of students, including returnees, did not speak in class voluntarily. Even in small group work, some students managed to remain relatively silent. In general, however, unlike the stereotype of the Japanese university student, most were motivated to learn to speak and write (i.e., to communicate) in English, they attended faithfully, completed homework, and participated in class activities.

During the semester, once a week or once every two weeks as part of class activities, the students wrote a journal either on a free topic or on a topic suggested by the teacher. In the latter case, the topic ordinarily related to class readings or films and involved a personal response rather than a summary or retelling of information (see Silver, this volume). At the end of a semester of study (between 1990 and 1992, depending on the group) the students in these four groups wrote a journal on journal writing, in English. We did not ask students to respond to detailed questions, but asked them to comment in any way they wished on what the experience of journal writing had been like for

¹See Simons, this volume, for a discussion of the communicative value of journal writing from the perspectives of students and teachers.

them, on how the experience affected both their language and their thinking, on what the value and difficulties had been.

I realized that students might have been inclined to write opinions that they believed would please their teachers, rather than ones that expressed their honest feelings. Therefore, I asked the Group 1 students to write a journal on journal writing in Japanese at the end of their two semesters, as a way for me to check the consistency, and thus perhaps the honesty, of their opinions. These were categorized and selectively translated by a Japanese research assistant who was bilingual in Japanese and English. Finally, as another check on the completeness and consistency of students' opinions in their journals in English, seven of the Group 1 students were interviewed in Japanese by the research assistant, who then summarized the audiotapes in English. The fact that a number of students expressed negative reactions across formats suggests that they were probably not just trying to please. Nevertheless, their own voices will have to serve as testimony to the honesty of their opinions. My job was to read through the hundreds of comments from the various sources and to categorize them in a way that reflects a balanced view of students' opinions. The preponderance of positive responses thus reflects the weighting that I discovered in the comments.

The Students' Views of Journal Writing

Language

Most students at all proficiency levels attributed positive changes in various aspects of their English to journal writing. Many comments report general improvements: my English improved, my writing improved, my composition skills (e.g., of organizing ideas, making them logical) improved. For these students, particularly those at the lower proficiency levels, the dream of one day being proficient in English seemed to be coming true as they began to see their own ideas materializing into English week after week.

One general comment that numerous students made was that by writing regularly, they began to "get accustomed" to English. This growing familiarity with the language no doubt contributed to the sense that they were becoming more proficient. One student who had transferred into Group 1 and who had written journals for a total of three semesters wrote:

In the last year during spring semester I wrote twelve journals and during fall semester I wrote ten journals. In this year I have already written eleven journals. In all together I have written as many as thirty three journals. Is my English ability improved through writing journals? I think it is improved because I get use to write English sentences and I get to have less difficulty than in the past I had. Words and phrases get to occur to my head easilier. In the last year

I had a hard time writing only just three lines because I couldn't remember words and phrases. I couldn't write sentences well even if I use a dictionary. ... When we study English, it is more important to get use to English than to learn English. Therefore I have to appreciate journal writing because it had me get used to writing English. (EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

Another Group 1 student wrote after just one semester that he regarded journal writing as "so important work for us." "Thanks to it," he continued, "I come to be able to write sentences in English easily. In September and October I was reluctant to write it. Now, however, I am used to writing it completely and I enjoy doing that" (EG, Engl J on J Wrtg, 1/92). This increased feeling of enjoyment and interest in English and in writing was expressed by a number of students. This sentiment seemed to accompany the successes that students were experiencing in getting used to writing on a regular basis and in producing texts in which their own thoughts were actually understandable to native English speakers.

Students also mentioned more specific ways in which they believed journal writing helped them improve their English. In both English and Japanese journals on journal writing, many students claimed that they had improved their vocabulary, their ability to write longer and more complex sentences, their ability to express ideas, and their understanding of what they called the "logical" writing and thinking of Westerners. One student wrote in Japanese that journal writing was "a good training for methodical writing." He said that he "came to check naturally the construction, concreteness, logic, and value of the contents." In an interview in Japanese, toward the end of two semesters of journal writing, another student noted some specific ways his English had changed:

I don't pay too much attention to grammar now. It's not that I don't care about it, but I have acquired a lot more grammatical knowledge. Maybe my grammar is sloppier, I'm not too sure. At least sentences are more complex. There are lots of simple sentences in my early journals. (EH, IV in Japn, 6/92)

Several more of the students who were interviewed commented that their sentences had become longer and more complex and that their vocabulary had increased as they attempted to incorporate words and expressions from class discussions and readings into their own writing. A number of students made similar comments in their English and Japanese journals on journal writing. For example, a Group 1 student wrote in Japanese, "The sentences I used in my [recent] journals are getting longer. Most of the in the earlier ones were compound sentences. But I tend to use more modifiers and complex sentences now to make them longer" (AT, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92). Another wrote that he thought he was using "more modifiers, conjunctions, and relative pronouns...." (KO, EH, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92).

We do not measure linguistic progress in English at SFC by means of standardized tests, but in one unusual case, an extraordinarily highly motivated student took the TOEFL after two semesters of English, and was astonished to see her score jump from 440 to 573 and to receive a 4 out of 6 on the TWE (Test of Written English). While we cannot establish for certain that her progress was due to journal writing, she believes it was:

I have been working on my journals just as a weekly assignment, but they seem to have improved my English. My TOEFL score went up from 440 to 573 and I also got 4 on the TWE. I'm especially happy about the "4" on the TWE because it means my English essay was evaluated to be fairly presentable, and I know I owe it to journal writing. YH, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92

While the vast majority of students' opinions on changes in their English as a result of journal writing were positive, a few students expressed uncertainty as to whether their English had improved. This was particularly so after the first semester, where progress was perhaps not yet obvious. A key factor for some of these students was the comparison of the amount of vocabulary they had memorized as they prepared for the university entrance exams with the vocabulary they used in their journals. Finding that there was no time to look up every word they wished to translate from Japanese, they were distressed at the simplicity and repetitiveness of their journal vocabulary, at the belief they were losing all the words they had previously learned, and at the fact that they were not able to express nuances of feelings in English. This kind of simplicity and repetitiveness is rarely a problem for teacher-readers, who are thrilled just to see on outpouring of language and thought from students. It is in their ability to produce a volume of comprehensible English where most students make such impressive progress, yet this progress is invisible to students who are focussing just on memorized vocabulary and subtlety of expression.

Only a few students, however, stated that their English had not improved (a state of affairs not obvious to their teachers)—two lower level students, and one returnee. One Group 1 student attributed this to the fact that she did not recycle vocabulary from class discussions and readings as she wrote her journals:

I have some reasons for not having improved my English. One of them is that I cannot use new words and idioms which I learned in class, therefore I use the same words and sentences in every journal again and again. I intend to use these new words in order to memorize them, but I forget them in writing journals and also in speaking. No matter how many words I learn, I don't have a good command of them. ... I feel very regret that I cannot make my English improved in spite of having written so many journals. (EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

This same student described herself as feeling “passive” about some of the journal writing in the second semester because she was busy with other things and had trouble finding topics that interested her. But by focussing so intently on vocabulary, this student missed seeing the areas where she had in fact improved.

Another Group 1 student who was unsure whether his English had improved claimed he did not understand what journal writing was all about until the end of the second semester. Believing that the main (or sole?) purpose of journal writing was the improvement of English, he wrote and told us in interviews that he didn’t think it was good “to deny the Japanese ways of teaching English and to do something completely different.” He felt more comfortable with the systematicity of the Japanese way of teaching English (comparing its grammar with that of Japanese), and seemed to prefer a grammatically oriented curriculum to one that claimed to encourage the growth of thinking—a goal he found too vague. But perhaps in his Japanese journal on journal writing the “truth” came out. In that journal, he stated that journal writing itself was an excellent way to improve writing skills in English, but that SFC students should be spending their time doing “what we really want to do.” The entire SFC curriculum was bad, he claimed, for putting too much pressure on students. While many students criticized the SFC curriculum in their journals, of the approximately 150 students who have shared opinions with us about journal writing, he is a solitary voice in the sharpness of his dissatisfaction with the entire system at the university.

The third student was a returnee who spoke unaccented English, but who had not enjoyed any of his three semesters of required English, particularly the writing. He spoke freely of his disaffection for English journal writing in his final journal on journal writing:

This is going to be my last journal, and how happy I am. I personally hated journal writing, not journal writing itself, but the fact that I had to write it in English. In fact I like writing journals in Japanese ... What irretates me the most is my lack of vocabulary. I have all of these Japanese words and phrases in my mind but I can’t write it down because I don’t know how to write it in English. This is really frustrating. It is like being asked what you think about Mt. Fuji and the only word you can say is ‘good!’ ... I have been writing for three semesters but I don’t think my ability of writing has improved. How could it, after all of the hate. (SK; ES, Engl J3 on J Wrtg)

A handful of other students, particularly returnee students at the end of three semesters of English, remarked that they “hated journal writing,” yet recognized that it benefitted their English in a number of ways.

With these few exceptions, those students who wrote specifically about improvements in their English quite consistently noted positive changes. Nevertheless, even students who reported overall improvement in English and in writing,

remained frustrated at their lack of ability to find the right words to express their thoughts, which were becoming increasingly complex over time. This issue of changes in thinking is taken up in another section.

Finally, there were mixed opinions about the relation between journal writing and speaking ability. A number of students made some fascinating remarks about this that revealed contradictory beliefs. Some claimed they saw no relation at all and others claimed that journal writing had greatly aided their speaking. Their arguments are both based on the issue of processing time: the longer processing time involved in writing allows them to formulate ideas into words and sentences. Some students believed that they would thus be unable to express themselves in speaking, even though the same ideas, words, and sentences might be used, because they would not have enough time in an ongoing oral discussion to formulate their ideas in speech. But one student commented during his interview in Japanese, that "it seems to me that if I can write, I can speak." He continued: "It still takes time to put what I think into English writing, but if the time is shortened, it means I can express right away what I want to say" (TK, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92).

Other students claimed to have found that journal writing had in fact helped them discuss similar topics in large and small group class discussions—that it had shortened the time required for them to formulate their ideas orally, partly because they did not have to do so much on-the-spot translating. One student phrased it thus in English, and several others expressed the same sentiment in their Japanese journals on journal writing:

Journal writing is change me a lot. Of course, my English ability of writing is improved, I think. On the other hand, speaking ability is improved too. Last semester, when we started to learn English in SFC, I thought Japanese sentence in my brain first and translated it to English sentence. Journal writing greatly affects the speaking ability. (JS, EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

Another way that journal writing helped students' speaking ability seemed to be the conversational tone of the journals. As one student expressed it in Japanese, "I would write my journals in the same way I talk to somebody, so I think it helped me to learn conversational English." He expressed this belief by telling how thrilled he was when, after two semesters of journal writing he went to Yokota Air force Base and spoke smoothly with an Air Force pilot there.

A final point to be mentioned in this section is my observation after reading so many journals on journal writing that there was not more discussion of language issues. I have discussed them in some depth believing that language teachers will find students' views of interest. In fact, most students, particularly those at higher levels, but even most at the lower levels, seemed more concerned with other aspects of journal writing. These are discussed in the following sections.

The Process of Journal Writing

Most of the students remarked on how the process of journal writing had changed for them over time. These remarks dealt for the most part with issues such as time spent on the task, ease and fluency of writing, and the role of dictionaries and translation in their journal writing. The following remark typifies the sentiment of diminishing anguish:

When I started journal writing last autumn, it was a quite difficult work. I didn't understand what journals were in the first place. I had no idea what to write about or how to write it. Secondly, I could barely reach the word limit. So journal writing for me was nothing but agony, and I was very anxious about whether my English would really improve if I continued just writing journals like that. But in the beginning of December, the pain and the anxiety were almost gone. (KM, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

This sentiment appears again and again, in English and in Japanese, by students at all levels, who tended to describe changes in their writing processes in terms of how easy or difficult it was to reach the minimum word requirement. One student wrote in Japanese at the end of his second semester of journal writing :

I think I'm a lot more accustomed to writing journals than in the end of the last semester. The 350 word limit doesn't seem that long, and when I wrote more than 500 words several times I didn't think they were any more difficult, either. I once wrote a little less than 800 words in Mr. Simons' class, and it was only as hard as the first journals with the 250 word limit. So I'm not conscious of the word limit too much now. (YS, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

However, it is not simply the case that writing just got easier. It did in part, but two other factors interacted with ease and difficulty of writing, influencing them greatly: time and topic. These two factors, moreover, influenced each other, in the sense that students felt they could not consider topics deeply enough when they were short of time. In general, students found that, within a month or two, the time required for them to write a journal was halved. As one Group 1 student wrote, he was able to cut his journal writing time from three to one and a half hours, partly by "using plain words and phrases" and not worrying about how sophisticated his language sounded.

But the students who periodically or regularly found themselves short of time found the journal writing process oppressive. They would sweat late into the night before the journals were due worrying about whether they would be able to meet the word minimum by the beginning of class the next morning. Pressed by other reports and by school activities, they found that they had to short-change either their other class work or their journal writing.

One student who had written interesting and lengthy journals in the first semester found he was too busy to keep up with them in the second semester. In this case, both he and I perceived that his written English had not progressed and may have even regressed. Moreover, he "suffered" more rather than less in the second semester as he tried to write the few journals he turned in; in other words, he seems to have missed the chance to "get accustomed" to writing, as most other students had. As an active participant in class discussions, he found that his speaking and listening abilities had soared. But, as he put it, "How improving my journal writing is?" He answered his own question as follows:

Maybe my ideas are deeper and my topics more interesting than in my last semester journals. But I don't write faster, smoother, more fluently than last semester. My ability of writing may not be improving. If it were improving, it was a little. As you know, this semester I am very neglect writing journals.... (EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

Not one student mentioned that the process of writing and of studying in general requires clever time management. But they were experiencing first hand how time and task interact.

Topic will be also discussed in the next section, but it also relates to this one. Many students remarked on the connection between the difficulty or interest level of the topic and the time and effort it took them to write. They are, of course, discovering something that every writer has learned by experience. The following comment, written in Japanese at the end of two semesters, is typical:

It is very hard to find subjects in journal writing. Sometimes I look for topics in newspapers. When I find a topic, I can go on and write about it. (MA, EG, Jpn J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

With a topic that interested them or about which they knew something, in other words, students could write relatively quickly and fluently, without considering word counts.

Another major issue in the process the students used to write journals was the extent to which they used dictionaries and translation techniques as they wrote. A typical pattern, documented by many of the students at all levels, consisted of their using dictionaries and translations extensively in early stages of journal writing, then, pressed by time, finding that working more directly in English was quicker. They began to discover strategies by which they could communicate what they needed to say in simpler vocabulary, a process that required letting go of the far more sophisticated and complex Japanese versions of their ideas that they carried in their heads. After one semester of English, this Group 1 student was still sorting out what role dictionaries should play as he wrote:

Writing journals this semester, I strongly feel I don't have enough vocabulary to write what I really want to express, which often turns out to sound childish. It's so frustrating. Should I actively use a Japanese-English dictionary when I have problems like this? I don't care for using it much, because it seems that I don't acquire much knowledge using one for the time I spend. Recently I started using an English-English dictionary, which is time-consuming, too. I still think it helpful to gain an English way of thinking—to explain a word using plain words in English. (YM, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

Most students found that they relied on dictionaries less as time went by. Some students, however, found that as their writing confidence and fluency increased, so did their tendency to discuss issues that were more difficult and more serious. As a result, the process became more rather than less difficult:

It's harder to write journals now because I take it more seriously. It's frustrating that I cannot express delicate nuances. So I'm more dependent on dictionaries, which results in my spending more time on details, because I don't want my teacher to misunderstand what I want to say. (SH, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92)

Most students also observed how the role of translation from Japanese into English had shifted for them over time. Students who began by writing in Japanese, then translating everything into English tended to find the process so time consuming that they were obliged to give it up. As one student remarked, "I used to translate what struck me word by word, but I changed the way after writing a few journals as I realized the inefficiency of this system" (AT, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). Other students recognized that as long as they continued formulating ideas first in Japanese, they would never develop the ability either to speak or to write directly in English. "I used to write in Japanese first," one student said, "but I realized that if you keep on doing that, you will never get out of the bad habit of thinking in Japanese first before speaking English" (MK, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92).

Moreover, students discovered what professional translators know—that perfect word for word renderings, especially in languages as different as are Japanese and English, could not be crafted, no matter how much time they spent at the translation task. A Group 2 student commented at the end of two semesters of English:

Gradually I get used to writing journals and I notice one thing. I was adhere to Japanese expressions too much. English and Japanese are quite different language, so looking for completely same expression is almost impossible. Make sentences in English from the beginning is the best way to write English. So writing journal is less painful than before. (EL, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

A few students additionally became aware of what, to them, seemed at first to be counter-intuitive—the fact that the more they were able to liberate themselves from the translation process, the fewer grammatical mistakes they tended to make:

It was interesting that the journal written after my decision not to open the dictionary as long as possible had less grammar mistakes than the ones written before. The reason might be that I avoided a translation from the Japanese expressions, which I often use when I wrote other papers. I was forced to think in English through this work. (EL, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

For students who still have little confidence in their writing or ideas, or who still fear making mistakes, such information might come as welcome news. But it is often just this kind of student who finds it difficult to let go of the security of the dictionary and of the expression of ideas in the safety of his mother tongue. One Group 1 student, who after one year was still taking three to four hours to write his journal, claimed he continued to write his journals in Japanese and then translate them. The translation process inevitably tied him to the dictionary. In an interview in Japanese he explained: "When I come across vague words or expressions whose meaning I'm not sure of, I cannot help but consult a dictionary" (YM, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). This student did not realize that he was not writing in English but undertaking a most complex and specialized task—translation—which requires a different set of skills than does writing.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle that students face as they write journals is the fear of making mistakes, particularly in front of teachers and peers. This reluctance has been instilled in the students over so many years that it may seem fruitless to try to eradicate it in two or three semesters of English classes (see McCornick, this volume). Nevertheless, many of the students who have written journals for one or more semesters have described a sense of liberation at losing their fear of making mistakes in their writing and at being able to express ideas without restraint. A student in Group 1 was one of many who wrote after his first semester of the liberating effect on his English of not having to worry about making mistakes:

Most of us had not written our thoughts in English before we began to write journals. And I thought that to write my thought in English was very difficult. In a way it is still difficult. But to write English was not so difficult as I had thought. Because we are allowed to make mistakes. Perhaps I am making some mistakes now. But I think that my ability to write English has been developed. (EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

Another Group 1 student said in an interview in Japanese that "journal writing helps get rid of the fear of making mistakes." She continued: "If I had

not been allowed to makes mistakes, I would have given up writing journals" (KO, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). Another Group 1 student expressed the same sentiment about the relation between the writing process and fear of making mistakes:

I don't mind if the teacher doesn't correct grammatical mistakes, because if she did, it would discourage me. When I think I can makes mistakes, I can write without any anxiety. (AT, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92)

Nevertheless, the writing process remained burdensome for many students, primarily because of increasingly heavy pressures from other aspects of university life that bore down on them towards the end of each semester and into the end of their sophomore years. Lack of time was described as the main culprit, in conjunction with the "Western" expectations on this campus that students should study and write reports for all their classes. If the university expected students to study seriously in all their classes, they often complained, then it should reduce the number of classes that students are required to take each semester. The students often felt torn between English assignments and those in other classes and between classes and outside activities such as clubs and part-time jobs. As one student commented in his interview in Japanese, "To tell you the truth, journal writing has been a pain in the butt—it would take up so much time from studying other subjects and from hobbies" (HK, EH, IV in Japn, 6/72).

The journal writing process suffered in all these cases, in the sense that the students found little time to contemplate ideas while writing or found themselves rushing through the task at the last minute just to get it done. If such students additionally had trouble deciding on or becoming involved in a topic, the process was painful indeed.

Topics

For a great many students, an everpresent issue in the journal writing task was that of topic and how it affected students' interest level, the ease with which they wrote, and their assessment of the journal writing task as a worthwhile activity. Opinions varied widely, but several themes reappeared over time at all proficiency levels. One had to do with the value of free and assigned topics and the concomitant role of topic familiarity. Another concerned the relative ease and difficulty of concrete and abstract topics. The overarching issue, however, was that of "having something to say."

In the first case, no clear preference emerged about whether free or guided topics were better. The students who preferred free topics were able to generate ones on their own that engaged them. These students either did not find the

topics from the class readings and films interesting, or if they found them interesting, did not then wish to base their personal journal responses exclusively on them. The students who preferred to respond according to guidelines or assigned topics often could not think of anything to say when left to their own devices.

A returnee student, for example, in whose class during the first semester I had given quite detailed response guidelines from some difficult readings, commented at the end of three semesters that at first the length requirement had been difficult. Later, topic choice became the problem as she struggled to find something to write about when there were no longer topic guidelines given. She claimed her mind often went blank. Lower level students talked about their increasing anxiety as the week progressed and they had still not settled on a topic. Some scanned the newspapers or watched television with new eyes, activities they later appreciated having done. The least satisfactory writing for the students was that which they did without an engaging topic. A Group 1 student reported:

I quite often had a hard time finding good topics, and so I keep contemplating what to write about till the last minute, which only leads me to write nonsense in the end. (KK, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

One student who struggled with what he felt were "dull and insipid" journals for many months was faced with a severe writer's block since he could not reach his own expectations of writing what he felt were interesting topics at a high enough level of sophistication. After we met and talked about writing—how difficult it was even for native speakers and how he needed to put himself into his writing (e.g., to write about how difficult it was to write)—he realized that he was "asking for the unobtainable" by setting his own standards too high. In an interview later in Japanese after having submitted some very interesting journals about writing and about himself, he said that he had decided not to give up, but to follow the advice to "write anything I wanted to write." In this student's case, in other words, the topics were not to be found in newspapers or on television, but inside himself. Even though general journal writing guidelines emphasized that all topics should somehow be related to the self, some students took time learning how to do this.

Students like these struggled with the free topic writing and might have found the process easier if more suggestions had been offered about ways to respond to themes we dealt with in class. But others clearly preferred free topic choice, which they found "more interesting" or easier, particularly if they wrote within the realms of their own knowledge and experience. "Fixed themes make it more difficult for me to write journals," one student said in his interview (YH, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). Another student pointed out the well known connection between topic familiarity and ease of writing. Those students who chose their

topics freely were also free to choose ones about which they were knowledgeable. But one student in the lower level class pointed out the educational benefits of not taking this easier route:

If I write about topics which I'm familiar with, I can write journals more rapidly, but if I write about topics which I'm familiar with, contents of my journals will become primitive, so I tried choosing topics which I'm not acquainted with. I think it's good to think about topics which I'm not familiar with. (NY, EG, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

Before their interview in Japanese, at the end of two semesters of journal writing, the seven Group 1 students were asked to look back over their past journals. Several students remarked that their earlier journals seemed "primitive" because they had discussed concrete, here-and-now topics (e.g., a description of a place they had visited), which were easier for them to write than were abstract ones (e.g., a discussion of good and evil)—an observation in line with what we know about first and second language and cognitive development. One remarked that "as my English improved, I began to write about more difficult subjects" (HO, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). Another said, "[When I look at my old journals], I only wrote about something very concrete. I didn't even think about writing about something abstract at first, which I do now" (AT, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). This discovery left students both thrilled at their progress and frustrated at how much more difficult the writing was becoming—they were learning that concreteness and specificity could be used to serve more abstract goals, and that abstractions are difficult to verbalize in any language. What was happening, of course, was that they were experiencing the normal frustrations of writers and thinkers, not just of language learners.

The point of this whole section may be that one of the biggest issues facing all students who write in the university is that of having something to say. Whether from a perceived impoverished knowledge base, lack of developed critical and analytical thinking skills, or lack of experience expressing personal viewpoints, most of the students we have worked with at Keio SFC enter the English program unsure as to whether they have anything to say, in public, at least. They thus tend to treat the issue of topic as merely one that is related to a homework assignment and not to larger issues of thinking and learning. One Group 1 student captured the fundamental importance of having something to say by noting, perceptively, that this need is not restricted to writing in a foreign language but that it applies even when we write in our native languages:

I don't think it's a big problem what language to use to express one's ideas. Of course, English and Japanese are the only languages that I know. Japanese is not necessarily the easier language to write things in. When I don't have anything to write about, or when I'm not conscious of issues in general, my mother tongue will not always help

me. On the other hand, if I'm sufficiently issue conscious, English is not a big problem. (HY, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

"Topic," in other words, turns out to be far more complex than it appears on the surface. From the students' perspective, the task of dealing with a given topic involves more than worrying about whether it is assigned or free. Interacting with this aspect of topic are issues such as whether students are already knowledgeable about their topics, how abstract the topics are, and whether in fact they have anything meaningful to say.

Educational Aspects

Although many students commented on general and specific changes to their English, many more noted that journal writing had influenced their thinking, their ways of seeing the world around them, their understanding of themselves (including the realization that they can come to "own" their ideas and their language), and other aspects of their education at SFC.

Students spoke about two main ways in which they believed their journal writing influenced their thinking. First, they commented that the writing was like a discovery process for them, helping them recognize and formulate their thoughts—a well-known phenomenon articulated by Zamel (1982) some time ago. As one lower level student phrased it during an interview in Japanese, "What I like about writing is that it's a recording of thoughts, and that by writing I can identify the thoughts. Writing on paper is writing in the mind at the same time, and that will bring me new ideas" (MK, EG, IV in Japn, 6/92). The discovery of new ideas, through the medium of English rather than of Japanese, was particularly exciting for some students. Another student remarked: "Since I started writing journals, I have several times been taken by surprise to discover my own way of thinking" (MS, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92).

In the language class, the normal essay writing tasks and in-class discussion activities may also help students discover their own thoughts, but there is little evidence that such discovery happens these ways. The particular educational benefit of discovery through journal writing seems connected to the absence of constraints (e.g., grammatical, rhetorical, affective) in most journal writing tasks.

Many students at all levels also commented that their thinking had "deepened" as a result of journal writing, and that this depth had contributed to the discovery process. The following comment typifies this sentiment:

I believe that the most merit in journal writing is to have chance to think deeply about some interesting or crucial topics and express my idea and opinion by writing....[W]hen I write down my works, I can understand what I have to do and begin what I can do at that time immediately. It is certain that writing is helpful for the realization of our thoughts. (TT, EG, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92)

Another student who was asked whether he thought he or his thinking had changed since he had been writing journals, responded "Yes, I do, greatly. When I write, I think deeply." He claimed that the deepening of his thinking was related partly to the pressure to examine topics he had never before considered and partly to the request from me in feedback to support his ideas with reasons. He attributed part of his improved thinking to his general SFC education, but singled out his English program as particularly influential:

Especially in the English class, they pick up topics I have never thought about or that I have avoided taking up. I learned the importance of reasoning. Everytime I just stated my ideas, Dr. C. [in her response] asked for the reasons. (TK, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92)

It was not journal writing, per se, in other words, that resulted in these educational benefits, but the way that journals were used in a particular class.

A second educational benefit that some students mentioned was that journal writing helped them take on a new perspective in a variety of areas. The following Group 1 student, for example, was one of several who developed new interests and shifted previously held views:

What I have acquired through journal writing is much bigger than what I had expected: the fear I long had towards English disappeared, and on the contrary I have become interested in English. English, which I did nothing but hate, has come to seem like an adventure in an unknown world. It also made me interested in other foreign languages. (TT, EH, Japn J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

Other students developed a questioning attitude that enriched their whole college experience, such as this student, whose remark is representative:

Without journals, I guess I never would have begun to question anything around. It changed my college life, compared with the life I would have had without the chance to write journals. (CS, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92)

A third area of educational growth concerns the personal development that some students attributed to writing. Through the discovery process involved in writing, this student came to recognize something important about herself that she had not articulated before:

I have written two or three journals on music and it proves that I love music so much and that I am a person with so many opinions on music. This is the discovery of myself. (AS, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

Some students also remarked that journal writing helped them relieve stress in their lives by giving them the chance to unload their feelings in ways they felt they could not do in person. Likewise, the many silent students—including many returnee students at Group 3—found journal writing to be their voice, when even at end of final semester of English they were still not able to speak comfortably in front of others (see Simons, this volume). One returnee student put it in a way that captures the flavor of these comments:

Journal writing, I think was the most effective activity we did in our English class. Since I was rather a quiet student in the class discussions we did, and didn't expose my opinions, the journals were a place where I could write those opinions. ... I didn't know I could think about one topic so deeply. (SN, ES, Engl J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

One returnee student, however, had a different opinion. For her, it was "a hard experience" to "put [her] emotion outside the heart and express the feeling." While the task did not require that she express her emotions, it did ask for a "personal response" (intellectual), a requirement she could not fully distinguish from an private emotional response.

Perhaps one of the most exciting educational benefits mentioned by some students was their perception that journal writing had helped them come to "own" their new language—helped take language from outside sources and internalize it in the minds of students. This is not the same as memorizing. It refers, rather, to a pragmatic ability to use new language to communicate. "I can write more fluently now," one student said, "because I'm getting used to writing, and the expressions I used in early journals can be mine, ready to be reused in new journals" (CS, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92). Another student, on looking back at his earlier journals, noted that "the English I used in the early journals seems hard to read." His explanation was that he "used to use expressions which were not my own" (TK, EH, IV in Japn, 6/92). Not just language, but ideas, too, came to be "owned" by the writers as they struggled to put their ideas in written form: "By writing down what is whirling in my mind, I came to organize it as my own opinions and thought" (TT, EG, Japn J on J Wrtg, 1/92). The process of taking ownership, perhaps one of the most powerful processes in education, thus works at two levels—that of language and that of ideas. According to some students, journal writing contributes at both these levels.

Finally, a number of students, particularly the returnee group, who had completed three semesters of English, commented on the ways that journal writing had influenced other aspects of their education at SFC. This finding is particularly interesting, given the typical view of foreign language instruction as marginally connected (if at all) to the rest of students' academic life. It also provides some evidence, in the minds of students, at least, of the transfer of skills—a slippery area in education. One student, for example noted that thinking skills are not subject-specific:

Even though the language is different between Japanese and English, I think that practicing to think deeply and analyzing topics is common to every subject we take in university. (KF, ES, Engl J on J Wrtg, 1/92)

Another returnee student who was looking back on three semesters of journal writing expressed the same commonly held belief—that the journal writing activity had ramifications beyond the English class. Through journal writing, he claimed to have improved the fluency and organizational abilities required to write all papers, not just those in English classes, and claimed as well to have learned the importance of critical thinking. Another returnee student had noted over the three semesters how her understanding of other subjects she had taken at SFC had deepened as a result of her having written about them in journals. One perceptive lower level student remarked that learning can take place in any language: “It was strange but interesting to know what I have not known not in my mother tongue but in foreign languages” (MW, EH, Engl J on J Wrtg, 7/92).

Finally, one returnee student, at the end of three semesters of English and of journal writing, spoke at length about the need for Japanese students to escape the yoke of the mechanized educational system and to learn to “Think and Create”—goals he believed that the Keio SFC campus espoused. He found that journal writing was the one outlet he had had to expand his thinking in these ways, and recommended that teachers continue asking students to write journals, “unless there is a better way to Think and Create.”

What the Students Have to Tell Us

If we try to condense what it is that these voices have said to us, several issues emerge that we as language educators and language teachers may find valuable to consider as we work with our own classes. I summarize these not in the form of a prescription for what we should do, but as matters that deserve discussion and that should probably be investigated anew within each new context of teaching.

The first issue concerns the overwhelmingly positive responses of students to journal writing. Most students reported improvements in English, in thinking skills, and in personal growth. The handful of totally negative responses, from over 100 students, seems to be idiosyncratic, and totally normal in any teaching situation, where we might expect 5-10% of any group to be dissatisfied. However, much further investigation needs to be undertaken in the Japanese context, and factors that contribute to these positive responses need to be identified more precisely. It seems that it is not the act of journal writing per se, but how and why it is done as part of class activities that will clarify its value as a pedagogical tool.

Related to this is the second issue, namely, that the perceived value or success of journal writing seems to depend on contextual factors, such as constraints

placed on the assignment (e.g., whether the topic is free or assigned, whether there is a word limit), what the nature of the topic is, and—most importantly—what else is going on in students' lives. Some of the students at Keio SFC find that the journal writing activity, as well as other required classwork in English and other classes, imposes on their time in uncomfortable ways. In other words, it did not seem to be the activity of journal writing and its consequences, except in a few cases, that displeased students. It was journal writing in interaction with other factors, most of which resided outside the classroom.

The third issue concerns the extent to which some of the thinking, writing, and learning skills that students seem to acquire through journal writing are, in fact, transferred to other educational contexts. There are at least two contexts in which the issue of transfer surfaces. The first is in the language class itself, in which some students reported that their speaking abilities improved in part as a result of journal writing. Other students reported no such effects. This question needs to be explored further. The second concerns the extent to which intellectual skills (such as critical and analytical thinking) and writing skills (such as organizational skills and clarity of expression) transfer to other university contexts, as some students reported they did. If this is, in fact, the case, then the place of English instruction in the university needs to be considered in light of the students' total educational experience, not just in the context of language learning.

Another issue should be mentioned, even though it cannot be resolved in this paper or perhaps even at all. It concerns the extent to which teachers should not only be aware of and sensitive to student input, but alter activities and approaches to accommodate critical feedback. As we have noticed in the case of students' criticisms of journal writing, many negative responses concern the interaction of the work of writing with other contextual factors, such as time pressures from other classes and activities, and how easy or concrete a topic is. Two extreme positions we can take are: a) as professional language teachers we know what's good for you, so do it; or b) in today's learner-centered classroom we are obliged to negotiate all activities with students and place on them the responsibility for their choices. I want to take a middle position, one that allows me to listen sensitively, not just perfunctorily, to students' voices and then to make decisions about language learning and educational activities based on what I hear in combination with what I believe as a professional educator. This is a dangerous position to take, in the sense that it leans toward choice "a" and hence possibly toward mindless authoritarianism. But if we listen to students' voices, some of which have been presented in this paper, and if we do this regularly, we can be reminded of the many contextual factors that help determine whether a learning activity we set up is actually educational or not. Reading our students' journals can help us do this.

Finally, a major issue that emerges as we listen to students' voices is that of individualized instruction. It is clear that, in the Japanese university context, the notion of individualized instruction may be a pipe dream. In large

classes, our traditional notions of individualized instruction cannot be realized. However, it may be that journal writing promotes a kind of individualized instruction that is unparalleled in the the history of English language education in Japan, in the sense that every student writes his and her own ideas to a responsive reader (see Harrison, this volume). Even without extensive feedback, teachers can make it clear that we have listened to the voices of each individual in our classes. Moreover, we can design activities whereby other students listen and respond to the individual voices within their own classes.

This paper testifies to the communicative value of journal writing, in that the students' voices emerged from the the journals they wrote—their communication with interested readers made this paper possible. Of course, journal writing that language learners do can also lead to academic writing, as some educators have pointed out (Vanett & Jurich, 1990). But even if that is not our main goal, the fact is that journals provide all students with a voice. If the students whose voices we have heard in this paper are honest in their evaluations of journal writing, then perhaps journals really do contribute in important ways to their educational, intellectual, and linguistic growth. Who could ask for more?

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